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ARGOSY

SEPTEMBER 19

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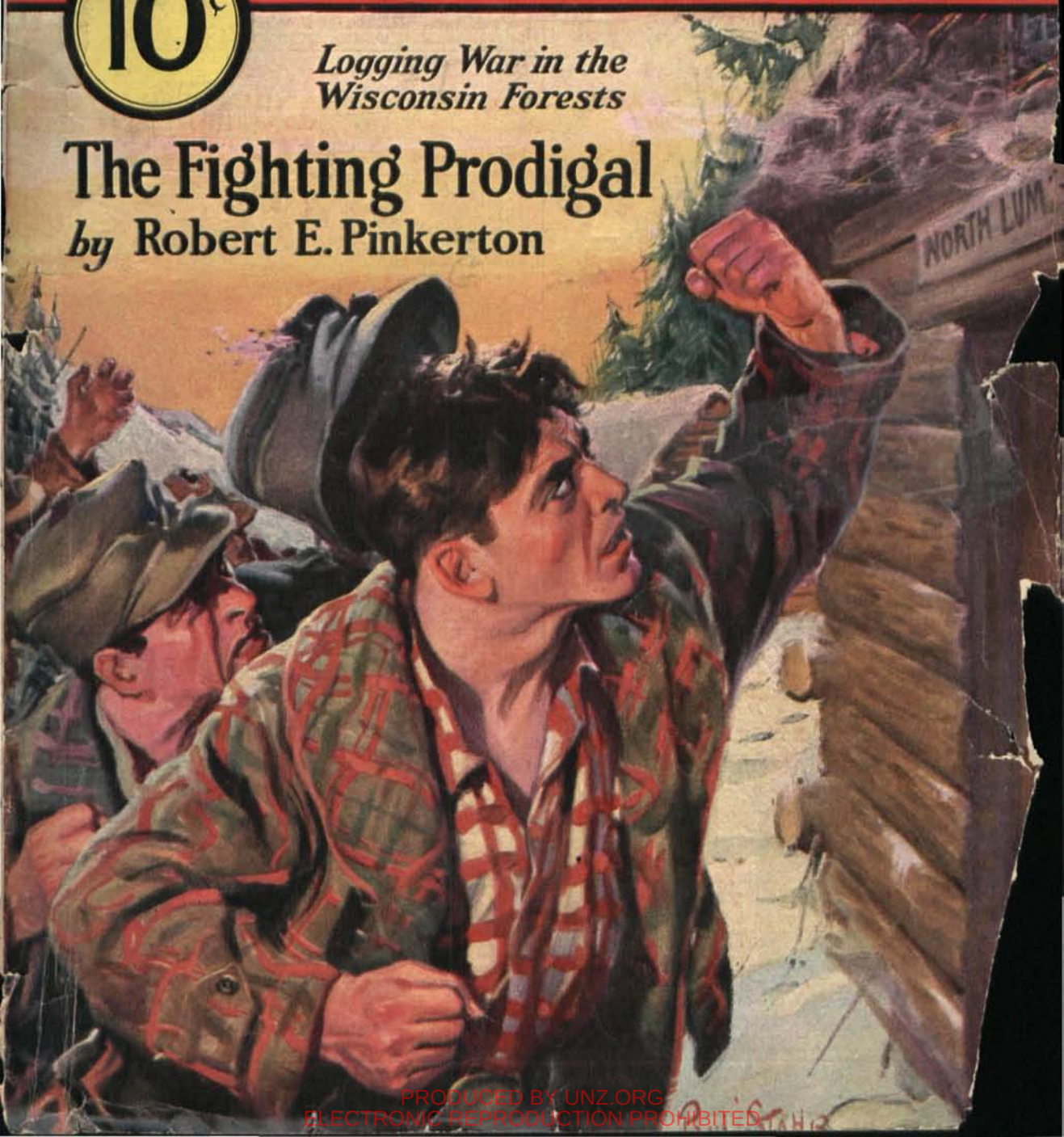
ISSUED WEEKLY

Logging War in the Wisconsin Forests

The Fighting Prodigal

by Robert E. Pinkerton



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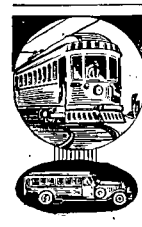

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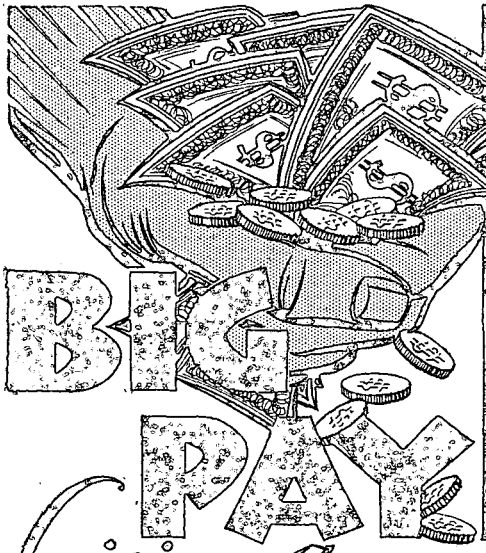

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ARGOSY

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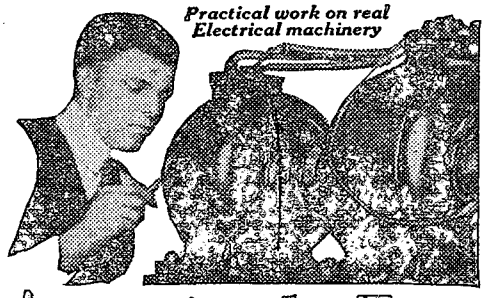

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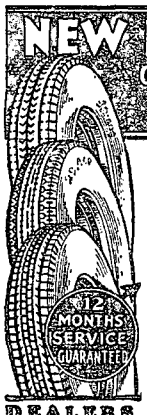

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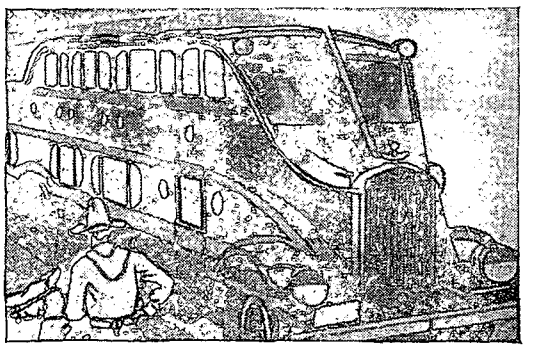

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ARGOSY

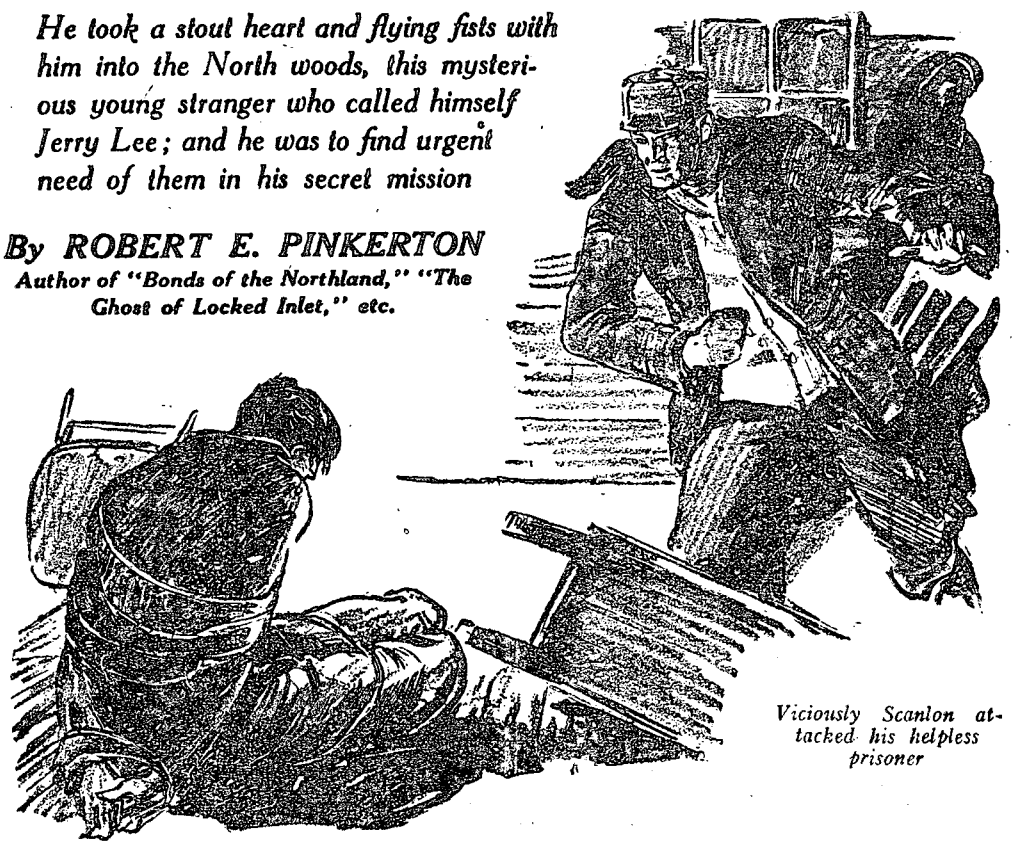
VOLUME 224 SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 1931 NUMBER 1

The Fighting Prodigal

He took a stout heart and flying fists with him into the North woods, this mysterious young stranger who called himself Jerry Lee; and he was to find urgent need of them in his secret mission

By ROBERT E. PINKERTON

Author of "Bonds of the Northland," "The Ghost of Locked Inlet," etc.



Viciously Scanlon attacked his helpless prisoner

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their calked shoes for a mighty leap into the wilderness.

Abner Strain's men were of a different breed, just as Joe North and Strain, both lumbermen, had nothing in common. Joe North's fists and courage had given him leadership; a driving, unconquerable force had brought success. Abner Strain entered the business through the door of a town office, with the ink marks of a bookkeeper's pen on his sleeves and the soul of a scheming figure juggler within his scrawny frame. His camps drew the scum of the woods, castoffs who stepped aside when a North man strode up to the bar.

A young man arrived in Barlow to attract instant attention. For years the same crews had gone into Joe North's camps, and he was not one of them. Nor did he look as if he would give way for anything that walked. He did not swagger, his eyes did not challenge, but they were clear and steady and cool.

Almost at once he was offered a job. Abner Strain's walking boss, harried by poor crews, saw the stranger step off the train.

"Want a job, Jack?"

"Who with?"

"Strain."

"No."

"Look here, feller," the walking boss insisted. "Don't believe all you hear. A good man don't make a mistake in tying to Strain. Those that talk about him—"

"I never heard of Strain before," the stranger said. "I'm going to get a job with North."

There was a finality in his tone that the other missed. "They'll put you to swampin'. I can't promise for sure, but I'm going to need a camp foreman pretty quick."

"I'm going to work for North," the stranger said, and he walked away.

HE went at once to the North storehouse. Men watched him as he walked across the clearing. It was not alone his size. There were bigger men in the North crews. Rather they sensed a purpose in his long stride. The clerk in the office sensed it when he entered, even before he spoke.

"I want a job."

"Jim Galt's at the camps," was the answer. "He told me before he left he didn't want any more men."

"I don't know Jim Galt and I don't care where he is. There never was a camp in these woods that didn't need a man."

"Strain needs 'em."

"Listen, feller," the applicant said in a low voice. "I want a job in a North camp. I'll settle with this Jim Galt later."

The office door opened and a man entered. "What you going to settle with me?" he demanded.

"I want to go to work for North and this runt says I can't."

Jim Galt was a big man, most evidently preoccupied. He scarcely glanced at the stranger. "The runt's right," he said shortly. "Camps are full. Strain needs men."

He jerked his head toward the door in sign of dismissal and at once became busy with the clerk on long lists of supplies. The young man started away, then came back.

"I can do as good a day's work as any man who ever wore calked shoes," he said earnestly. "I want to go to work in North's camps. If you'll—"

Galt whirled from the desk. "Git!" he roared. "I don't want you or anybody else."

Still the young man hesitated, but

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when Galt turned away he went out of the storehouse.

There was no longer a purpose in his stride. It was savage as he walked toward the nearest saloon, and there was a bleak, set expression on his face. He stepped up to the bar and asked for a drink.

A fight was in progress in the rear of the saloon but no one watched it. The young man took his glass to a corner table and sat down, facing the room.

Men looked at him. They did not approve of that solitude, and one or two made audible comments. The stranger did not seem to hear. He sat staring at the table, a hard glint in his eyes. More comments were made, and they were open challenges now.

At the far end of the bar a heavy voice rose above all else. "There's a man workin' for Strain that I always promised meself I'd whip and I've come near to forgettin' it. Out o' my way, you jacks. I'm goin' lookin' for him."

A big fellow plowed his way through the crowd. His broad face was twisted into what he believed to be an expression of dire threat, but its innate humor and good nature only made his effort ridiculous. Men laughed and thumped him as he passed.

"You'll just plain scare him to death, looking like that, Rory!" one shouted.

The continual thumping dislodged the purpose in Rory's mind. His fierce stride wavered. The scowl faded. Suddenly he stopped, perplexed.

"Now what was it I started—"

His uncertain glance found the young man at the corner table and instantly his eyes flamed with delight.

"Glory be!" he roared. "Here's a feller I've never whipped. Come on, pretty boy, and get your nice new clothes mussed."

THE stranger did not move, nor did his expression change. His cool eyes surveyed Rory's thick shoulders, heavy arms and barrel chest, noted the granite cast of the big head. They saw, too, the laughing glint in blue eyes, and were not deceived by it.

Rory stopped when there was no response to his challenge. "Have I got to content meself by givin' ye a slappin'?" he demanded.

"One slap, and I throw you out of the place," the young man answered coolly. "If you had a reputation—"

There was a studied insolence in the last and Rory leaped straight up. His head struck a kerosene lamp, shattering the globe, but as the glass showered head and shoulders he lifted heedless fists.

"Reputation!" he bellowed. "The impudence of the brat askin' Rory O'Keefe if he's got a reputation. Listen, ye cub! There's one man on Beaver River who's licked me, and that's no less than Joe North himself. On yer feet. I'll use only the flat o' me hand on ye."

For the first time the young man grinned. "That wouldn't be so bad," he said, and quite deliberately he arose and stepped out from behind the table.

Every one in the saloon was watching now. Rory O'Keefe could whip any of them, and when he fought there was something worth watching. They did not expect a real battle, of course. The stranger was big, but not big enough. He was too rangy. They liked Rory's thickness, the solidity of his body, and they knew the worth of that glad acclaim with which he entered a fight. They were amused rather than interested.

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The stranger stumbled as he stepped from behind the table. A foot caught and he fell toward Rory. Or so it seemed. But as he fell a leg darted forward, caught a grip on the floor, and the thrust of that leg was added to the power behind a fist that shot out from the waist and caught Rory O'Keefe three inches above the top button of his trousers.

Rory went back—and down. His big body was doubled up. An expression of intense pain flashed in his face.

Men looked at the place Rory had been, then where he lay. When they glanced toward the stranger they saw him again in his seat behind the table, staring at his empty glass.

After a few moments Rory O'Keefe rose to uncertain feet and looked about.

"Who broke out that rollway when I was asleep beneath it?" he demanded. "And that lad I was thinkin' o' slappin'—"

He saw the young man at the corner table and started toward him, arms outstretched, face beaming.

"How you did it, I don't know!" he shouted. "I might say it was luck, or me foot slipped, or I wasn't expectin' much from one so young and slender. But that's not the point, me boy. You put Rory O'Keefe on his back, and when that's done nothin' more's to be said. Bring us a drink over here."

He dropped into a chair and threw a huge arm across the young man's shoulders. The crowd turned back to the bar.

"Boys, oh, boys!" Rory chuckled when the drinks had been served. "If ye ain't the modest lad, too. Not for ten years has any one licked me. Not since Joe North himself did it at Camp One the first winter I worked for him. There was a fight! Forty minutes it lasted, and both of us blind and staggerin' like we was drunk. A lot of the lads here saw it. They can tell you."

RORY downed his drink and hugged the young man enthusiastically.

"Even at that, ye might have found a doubt," he continued. "Joe North was a savage man that year, his boy havin' run away on him. It made a devil of a man of Joe, the thing he thought was anger and wasn't. But it did give him a savage feelin' and when me, new to his camps and cocky as a bull cook in his first pair o' cork shoes, passed him some lip, Joe came at me with eight fists flyin'."

Rory laughed his delight at the memory. Then his beaming face became serious and he asked in a hoarse whisper, "Lad, how many times did ye hit me?"

"Once."

"That settles it. There's no more doubt in the mind of Rory O'Keefe. Whether I was lookin' or not, and no matter where the lone fist landed, it's never been done before. A pile driver might, but no mule, and no man until you came along. Have another drink with me, lad. It'll give me pleasure."

The young man smiled. There was no escaping it. Rory's delight was too genuine. The big fellow thought as he fought, openly, freely and without shame or hindrance.

"Ye're goin' into Joe North's camps, lad?" he asked. "And what's your name? I never saw ye before."

His companion hesitated. "Lee," he said at last. "Jerry Lee. I've never worked in Wisconsin and I wanted a job with North."

"Then come to Camp Four. It's Joe North's own crew there. We get

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the toughest loggin', and bring down the rear of his drives, and we're hell cats from the devil's own private hot room."

"Galt told me he didn't need men."

"What?" Rory bellowed. "No man ever needed 'em more. Logs left in the woods last winter! His drive hung last spring! Jim Galt was like a crazy man, fighting hard luck and a snow and flood. I'll speak to Jim meself and you'll come to Camp Four with me."

Jerry Lee whirled in his chair. "Drive hung!" he repeated in an incredulous tone. "A North drive?"

"And why!" Rory O'Keefe demanded harshly. "Joe North flat on his back in bed. Two years now, and he's no better. The same crew, same everything, except Joe himself."

Jerry gripped the big riverman's arm. "What's that?" he demanded, and now his tone was savage. "Joe North in bed two years. What—what—?"

"And they say he can't speak, or hear much." Rory answered. "Think of that! The man who whipped me! He's over in Europe somewhere trying to get cured."

Jerry released his grip and sank back. Rory went on with a tale of misfortune, of excessive toil that went for nothing, and he was unaware that Jerry Lee was not listening.

The young man had slumped in his chair. The life was gone from his body, the cool confidence from his eyes. They stared dully. Suddenly he arose and stumbled toward the door.

Night had come. Jerry walked across to the tiny railroad station and learned that a freight train was passing southward in an hour. He bought a ticket, went outside to wait.

Barlow was turbulent. Shouts and sounds of battle came from the two crowded saloons. Men wandered about in the darkness outside, whooping and singing. Jerry Lee heard nothing, saw nothing. Motionless, wide shoulders slumped, he sat on a box near the station window.

HE had not stirred a half hour later when a man came around the corner of the station. He glanced at Jerry in the light from the window, went inside, came back.

"Listen, feller," he whispered. "I can give you a job in a North camp."

"Don't want it!" Jerry snapped.

"This ain't no ordinary job, Jack. It's something special. Good money. Much as you want to make."

"Don't want it!" Jerry repeated more harshly. "Leave me alone."

The stranger was small, furtive, a rattish sort of person who had instantly aroused Jerry's contempt. Now he aroused suspicion.

"I saw what you did to O'Keefe," the man persisted. "I heard you talking to him, and I knew you was what we wanted. I'll get you a note to Mike Scanlon. He's foreman of Camp Four. Whip a few more and you've got your winter's stake."

Jerry had risen, was about to kick the fellow off the platform, but that last hurried statement stopped him.

"Few more of what?" he demanded.

"Joe North's old-timers. Scanlon'll tell you. Ten dollars for each one that asks for his time."

Jerry did not speak or move. His back was to the window and the stranger could not see his face.

"How about it, Jack? Pretty soft, eh? You going?"

"Yes," Jerry said suddenly. "Where's this note to Scanlon?"

"Stay here. I'll get it for you."

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The fellow disappeared past the corner of the station. Jerry slipped around the other way, close to the building. He saw a shadow crossing to the Strain storehouse and then the Strain office door opened and closed. He ran toward it, saw a thin, bald-headed, sharp-faced man writing at a desk.

A few minutes later the stranger found Jerry at the station and handed him an envelope. "Give it to Scanlon," he whispered, and disappeared.

Jerry remained where he was until the freight came in. Then, walking to the other side of the locomotive, he held the flap of the envelope in a jet of escaping steam.

After the freight had gone, Jerry entered the station and read this note, unaddressed and unsigned:

> Here is the man I have been trying to find for you. He'll get the results we want. He has been told nothing. Use your discretion.

CHAPTER II.

A CONSPIRACY.

JERRY LEE walked the thirty miles to Camp Four with Rory O'Keefe. Rory had celebrated his downfall too well to be surprised that Jerry had a job or to remember much of their conversation. He recalled only that here was the man who had whipped him, and his instant allegiance was manifested in repeated protestations.

But thirty miles on a tote road is a long way, and Jerry waited until Rory was quiet, and completely sober.

"What is the matter with Joe North?" he asked.

"If the doctors knew, he might be a well man," was the answer. "It hit him like your own fist hit me, when the camps started in the fall two years ago. He couldn't talk and he couldn't move. We carted him out to White Pine and Ben Blair, his old walking boss, run the camps. Ben did fine, took out a big drive, and from that day to this, no one's ever seen him."

"What do you mean?" Jerry asked sharply.

"What I said. No word and no trace. Then Jim Galt got the job. He's from further east. He's a good man, but he's had the hardest luck I ever saw in the woods. There's millions of feet on the ground we couldn't get to the river, and millions more we couldn't get down to the mill. And Joe North flat on his back and helpless. At that he was lucky."

"How?" Jerry demanded.

"He knew nothin' of it. He'd already been shipped off to Europe. Switzerland, I think it was. And the doctors wouldn't let him hear a word. Nor could he, they say."

"He's there now, in Switzerland?"

"And may die there, they were saying in White Pine," Rory answered in a low voice. "There never was a logger like Joe North, and he never earned that."

Jerry was silent for a while as they trudged on.

"Who's this Scanlon at Camp Four?" he asked at last.

"Never saw him. The old foremen are all gone, after last winter."

"Is Galt a good man?"

"He knows logs, and he works harder'n any walkin' boss I ever see. He's unlucky, is all, or was last year. I'm hopin' so, for another year like the last will wipe Joe North clean."

They reached Camp Four after dark, among the first to arrive. Rory turned in at the sleeping camp, but Jerry went on to the little log office. Two men were there, a tall, raw-boned

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fellow of middle age and a second, unmistakably the clerk. Jerry leaned across the counter and whispered to the big fellow.

"I was sent."

Mike Scanlon whirled and looked sharply at Jerry.

"What you know?" he demanded.

"Nothing."

"What—what they tell you!"

"Ten dollars per."

Swift scrutiny flashed in Scanlon's eyes.

"You don't look it," he said with a sneer.

"Meaning you want a demonstration?" Jerry asked, quietly.

"Listen, feller," Mike growled. "I'm not here to prove anything like that. I'm foreman of this camp, and I'm running it. I use an ax handle or piece of logging chain or anything that comes handy."

Jerry jerked an ax handle from a bundle in a corner and laid it on the counter.

"Start," he whispered.

IT was only an instant that Scanlon hesitated, but it was enough. Contempt flashed in Jerry's eyes.

"Ain't he the touchy one, Ed?" Mike laughed as he turned to the clerk. "But if he's achin' for a fight, he'll get plenty from North's hellions. Where you from?"

"State of Washington."

"That's pickin' a stranger!" Ed Jackson, the clerk exclaimed.

Jerry ignored that. "What you want of me?" he demanded of Mike Scanlon.

"To earn a lot o' those ten dollar bills," Scanlon grinned.

"Why don't you fire 'em and be done with it?"

"We do things different here in Wisconsin. Quite a bit different," and Scanlon winked at Jackson. "We've had one queer winter and we're in for a queerer one. You're only doing a bit of it, feller."

"How was you figurin' on me working this?"

"It won't be hard. North's men don't like strangers and they'll ride you plenty. Just work 'em around to makin' an agreement that the one who loses has to leave camp. And if you can't do that, whip one and ride him until he's glad to leave."

Again scrutiny flashed in Scanlon's eyes, an expression of doubt.

"Don't worry about my part of it," Jerry said.

"Not too fresh, lad," Scanlon advised seriously. "They've always been a hard bunch, this Camp Four outfit. And steer clear of Rory O'Keefe."

"I started on him in Barlow," Jerry answered as he turned and went out.

The men straggled in that evening, rather bleary and decidedly ill-tempered as a result of thirty miles on top of their hard drinking. Most of them had been in the saloon when Jerry had his encounter with Rory O'Keefe but, except for a glance, ignored him.

The next morning the camp sprang to life as if months had not elapsed since the crew departed on the drive. The accomplishment of a full day's work was the pride of each man, and nothing stood in its way. After a day in the crisp air, they were in a better humor that night.

A few nodded to Jerry. All looked at him with appraisal and interest. A one-blow defeat of Rory O'Keefe was not entirely a fluke, and some had watched him at work that day.

"You're a stranger," a man next to Jerry said as they sat on the deacon seats after supper.

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"Complete," was the curt answer.

"I'm not pumpin' you," the man replied calmly. "I've been working for Joe North fifteen years and I know his outfit. Camp Four's a bit clannish. They're all old-timers and they're liable to make it hard for a newcomer."

"Maybe I can take care of myself," Jerry said.

"Maybe so. I saw you and Rory in Barlow. But that ain't everything."

A man across the camp shouted to Jerry's companion, used his name. Jerry turned with quick interest. "What did he call you?"

"White Water. Dan Wheeler's my name, but they generally call me White Water Dan."

JERRY'S manner changed at once. "What's this about North having a hard season last year?" he asked.

Wheeler explained it. He spoke calmly, displayed an intimate acquaintance with all the problems of logging. "Jim Galt'll make up for it," he concluded. "Can't have two winters in a row like last. And the boys don't like it, havin' a drive hung. They'll get the logs to the sorting booms next spring."

"How about Scanlon?" Jerry asked.

"That's to be found out," White Water Dan answered in a noncommittal tone.

They became friends, these two, sitting there in the evenings after supper. Jerry did not ask many questions, but he listened, directed the conversation.

Nor did he make any move toward earning a ten-dollar fee. Peace dwelt in Camp Four. Mike Scanlon never came into the sleeping camp, but when he made his rounds in the woods he watched Jerry. After a week he spoke.

"When you goin' to start somethin', feller?"

"Soon enough," Jerry retorted.

"Make it quick or I get some one in here who will."

That night Jerry spoke in a whisper to White Water Dan. "Noticed anything queer going on in this camp?"

Dan did not even glance around. He puffed at his pipe for a moment.

"Joe North's crew can't fail two years runnin'," he commented at last.

"They're going to," Jerry said.

Dan was not startled. "Scanlon?" he asked.

"A blind man could see that. We'll haul few logs on the roads he's laid out. Take a squint at the grades tomorrow. Look where he's put the rollways. And he's riding the crew. This outfit needs a foreman who never leaves the office. They'd bank more logs. What's going on in the other camps?"

"About the same, from what a tote teamster told me last night."

"Sure. Now what do you know about Jim Galt?"

White Water Dan started. "Jim's all right," he said. "He's a logging fool. Near went crazy last year, trying to get that drive through."

"Maybe," Jerry said coldly. "I'm going to find out."

A few minutes later Dan asked, "How?"

"Watch me."

Galt appeared the next day, walked across the slash and down the logging roads with Mike Scanlon. He made no comments, asked no questions, but that night after supper he appeared in the sleeping camp. Scanlon accompanied him.

"This camp's rotten," Galt began at once. "You're going to bank fewer logs than last winter if you don't get a hustle on you. Thought you were all friends of Joe North."

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He said a lot more. It was scathing. Rory O'Keefe sat next to Jerry. "Jim's scared," he whispered. "After last year. But we'll show him."

No one interrupted the walking boss, who quickly worked himself into a fury. When he had finished he turned abruptly to the door.

"Wait a minute," Jerry Lee called. "We're not the ones for you to jump on."

GALT whirled back. "Who said that?" he demanded in fresh fury.

"I did," Jerry answered calmly. "Give us a foreman and you'll have no complaints."

Mike Scanlon started forward but Galt caught his arm.

"We can't work for a foreman who doesn't know his business," Jerry continued. "Scanlon couldn't pile cordwood."

The foreman broke away then and came charging down the camp. Jerry leisurely arose, raised his arms, rested his chin behind his left shoulder. As Scanlon rushed up, both fists flying, Jerry side-stepped and drove a left to the foreman's ribs.

It was not a hard blow. It only stopped Scanlon, who charged in again. He had weight and strength. He was a veteran of the rough and tumble. His actions and manner showed that, and his rage would have carried him into anything.

And yet he was a child in Jerry's hands. A skill those heavy fisted men had never known was flashed before their eyes. They saw the young man weave and feint, saw his feet were more active than his hands, and they saw those hands driven with unerring precision.

They saw more than that. Jerry was playing with Scanlon. It was unmistakable. His coolness and deliberation showed it, and the calculating glint in his eyes. For several minutes he conducted that encounter according to his own ideas, and then, without added exertion, he ended it with a blow no one was ever able to describe.

Jerry returned to his seat. Jim Galt did not speak, but when Scanlon rolled over and sat up, then scrambled to his feet, the two went out together. A few minutes later Ed Jackson, the clerk, summoned Jerry to the office.

Galt was still silent. Scanlon rose from a chair and shook a fist at Jerry. "What you tryin' to do?" he demanded.

Jerry did not answer, but looked at Galt. The walking boss was worried, and studying the young lumberjack.

"You're playing us dirt!" Scanlon rushed on. "Why ain't you tackled some of North's old-timers?"

"So that's it," Jerry said, and he faced Galt. "I figured you were in on this, and that's why I showed Scanlon up. He was queering things fast."

"How?" Galt asked coldly.

"North's men aren't complete fools. They're smellin' something, asking questions of each other. Scanlon's work is too raw."

"Why do you care?"

"Don't want to be on the wrong side when they blow up."

"They suspect last year?" Galt asked anxiously.

"Not a thing. They're for you. Say you had hard luck."

"What we care what they think?" Scanlon demanded contemptuously.

"Mike, you're through here," Galt said. "I was afraid it wasn't your sort of work. You'll go back to last year's job. Lee, think you can run this camp?"

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"I know I can," Jerry answered sharply. "And run it any way."

"You're foreman."

"Not so fast. I've been looking, and listening. I've guessed some things. If I run this camp, I've got to know."

Galt asked many questions. They led through Jerry's life, a life spent partly at sea in square riggers, partly in the logging camps of the Pacific Coast, at that time new and strange and remote.

"All right," Galt finally grunted. "You're a stranger, and the sort we're looking for. Eh, Mike?"

CHAPTER III.

PLANS FOR BATTLE.

THE next day Jerry Lee, in his first rounds through the woods as foreman, stopped beside White Water Dan Wheeler and whispered, "Go down the logging road past the first bend. I'll be there soon."

Dan was waiting, without apparent curiosity.

"Know a man named Len Hardy?" Jerry asked.

"He's driving team in Camp Three."

"There was a kid once who wanted to go to sea and be a sailor," Jerry began in an odd, flat tone. "His father wouldn't let him, so the kid ran away. He didn't get far. His father caught him and gave him a licking and told him to stay at school. The boy waited a year and tried it again.

"He was a husky youngster, about fifteen. His father was a big man, and he was used to having things his own way. He caught the kid the second time and brought him back. He took him out of town, into the woods, and he gave that kid an almighty bad licking. 'I'll break you of that if I have to kill you,' he says.

"The boy was about all in but he never backed down. 'I'm going to be a sailor,' he said to his dad, 'and to the devil with you.' So his old man waded into him again."

Jerry stopped and looked down the wide logging road. His eyes were hard. His mouth was hard. A powerful emotion held him breathless. At last he shook himself, relaxed, but he did not look at White Water Dan.

"Go down to Camp Three," he said harshly. "Tell Len Hardy that story, just like I've told it to you. What the kid said. 'I'm going to be a sailor and to the devil with you.' Then come back here."

Jerry strode off. Dan went down to Camp Three and was back at supper time, but it was not until the next forenoon that Jerry again spoke to him in the woods, motioned him down the logging road.

"You needn't 'a' sent me to Len Hardy, lad," Dan said when Jerry joined him. "I would 'a' believed you."

"Then you believe I'm Jerry North?"

"I know it, and Len says he'll never forget how you said that to Joe."

"I didn't know any other way to prove it to you. Len happened on us in the woods. My father said he'd kill him if he ever spoke of it. But I had to prove it, Dan, to you and the rest of the old-timers. The old man was right. I got all the sailoring I wanted. But it wasn't easy to get away from, until I hit Grays Harbor, out in Washington, and when I saw a logging camp I quit the sea for good.

"That didn't change things for me, though. I had one idea all the time. I wasn't coming home until I knew I

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could whip him. It's why I came up here. I'd always figured how I'd do it. Get a job in one of his camps and wait for him to come. He wouldn't think about me coming back that way. And I knew enough of Joe North to see how easy it would be to pick a fight with him."

Jerry stared down the road.

"Ten years planning on one thing, getting big enough and l e a r n i n g enough," the young man said bitterly; "Then coming back and finding he can't lift a hand."

STILL, White Water Dan waited. He knew more was to come and that the present mood would pass. Jerry started away, wheeled back.

"I remember you, Dan," he began abruptly. "It's why I cottoned to you in the sleeping camp at night. Joe North's got to have help, lots of it."

"There's more'n two hundred of the lads who'll do anything for Joe North," Dan said simply.

Jerry stared at him for a moment, then grinned. "And me!" he exclaimed. "Coming back with no idea but to give him the sort of whipping he gave me, and now having to turn to and— Dan, we've got a job cut out for us."

"But you put Scanlon on the skids."

"Scanlon! It's Jim Galt and Abner Strain. I'm not to the bottom of it yet, but Galt told me enough, and I'll learn the rest. By next summer they'll have my father broke and own all that timber on the West Fork."

"They can't do that to Joe North, even if he is sick," Dan growled.

"Can't, eh? Galt's clever. Not one of you old-timers even suspected he ran things so last season was a failure. He must have gone pretty far in the hole, and with another bad year the North Lumber Company would be swamped in debt and no logs to saw. Galt borrows from Strain to keep going, and Strain takes the West Fork timber as security. Simple and easy.

"This year they knew they could not fool you old-timers much longer. So I was hired to run as many of you out of camp as I could, one way and another. With you boys gone, and the scum of the woods in your places, he'd have a clear field."

"Good t h i n g you caught it in time," White Water Dan commented.

"I haven't," Jerry answered. "Galt has complete power in the North Lumber Company. My father signed papers for it. Galt's safe. Even if my father lives, he's so sick nobody can get to him. And even if I proved I'm Joe North's son it wouldn't do any good."

"Galt tell you Strain was in it?"

"No, but I've a note in Strain's handwriting that I'm keeping. Galt did not tell me any more than he had to, even when I forced him to put me in as foreman here. We've got to work this from the inside, Dan, and for a while I've got to pretend I'm doing all he wants. You're the one to start the trouble."

"Anything you say. But, look here, lad. How about Ben Blair? He'd been your dad's walking b o s s for fifteen years."

"I remember Ben. Disappearing as he did, there's only one answer. Murder. But we can't prove that against Galt yet. Right now you can get things lined up."

WHITE W A T E R DAN was gone four days. He returned in mid-afternoon and found Jerry in the woods.

"First there's your dad," he report-

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ed. "I saw old Doc Atkinson in White Pine. Told him I just happened in, and the boys in the camps was anxious to know how Joe is coming on. The doc says Joe couldn't sign a paper if he had to, or even be told about business. He's in Switzerland, and the doc gets reports every week or two. There's a chance Joe will get well, but it 'll be a long time. Ain't it like Ab Strain to pick on a man down as bad as that?"

"And the old camp foremen Galt kicked out?" Jerry asked.

"I got hold of Marty Malloy and Dave Fall. George Wray was in a Kettle River camp, and I sent him a letter. Steve Rawson's disappeared, but I left word for him."

"And the other camps?"

"I picked a good man in each. Got 'em off alone while they were at work and told what's happening. They've all been with your dad a good many years and you won't have to worry about 'em. They'll have the other three camps lined up. What you done?"

"Nothing with the men," Jerry answered. "Left that for you. I have changed the logging roads a bit. Had to do that before g r o u n d freezes. Changed rollways, too. How were things in the other camps?"

"Galt's cute," Dan said. "Nobody has noticed anything. He's been in each place, givin' 'em the deuce, like he did here."

"You told them what to do?"

"Sure. There'll be a howl to the foreman in every camp. Galt's gone to White Pine, but it won't be long before he'll find out something about you, lad."

"That's all right after I've had just one more talk with him. Then Galt's telling the truth about not being able to get word through to my father!"

"Not a line. He don't know about the hung drive last spring. It was doctor's orders not to send reports."

"That puts us on our own," Jerry said soberly. "Understand, Dan? We haven't any money, we haven't any rights, we haven't anything, and we've got to bank fifty million feet and drive 'em out next spring."

"We've got the men to do it," White Water Dan said confidently.

"Men, but no pay for 'em! Men, and n o t h i n g to feed 'em!" Jerry gripped Dan's shoulder, shook it savagely. "You think you had a tough winter last year, but wait until we're into this one."

That night White Water Dan spread the word of what was afoot. Camp Four had always held the cream of the North crew and so far the plotters had not dared to change it. A few strangers had been introduced, but fifty men were known and dependable.

Rory O'Keefe was wildly jubilant. "Nothing but a splinter off of old Joe himself could 'a' given me a lickin'!" he exclaimed in a dangerously loud whisper to White Water Dan. "I been broodin' about that fight in Barlow. I got to wonderin' if me foot didn't slip, or something of the sort."

"You saw what he did to Scanlon."

"Scanlon! Tricks licked him. But in a real fight! I'd got meself all worked up to trying it again."

There was a purpose in the work at Camp Four the next day. The crew had not taken kindly to the changes Jerry had made, the undoing of Scanlon's work. They had resented a youth and a stranger being placed over them. For years they had been practically their own foremen in Camp Four.

But now, when Jerry made his morning rounds, they greeted him with grins and, if alone, with profane declarations of loyalty and of confidence.

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"Lay into it."

"Keep moving, lad, or you'll have our calks in your heels."

A WEEK after Jerry took charge, all Scanlon's work had been undone. Logging roads were in perfect shape and laid out most efficiently. Falling and skidding were going on apace. Then Jim Galt arrived.

Jerry and Ed Jackson, the clerk, were in the office. The walking boss spoke no word of greeting. He was worried. His expression and eyes told that, and his first glance, to Jerry's face, quickly shifted to Ed Jackson's, and was a question. The clerk's answer was a blank stare. He knew nothing.

"Well?" Galt rasped. "What's your trouble?"

"Haven't any," Jerry answered curtly.

Galt started. "How's North's men behaving?"

"Don't see why you want to get rid of them," Jerry said. "I could make half of them believe a Norway is a white pine. I've put some crimps in the logging roads Scanlon never thought of, and nobody got wise."

"Let's see your falling and skidding tallies."

Jackson laid them on the counter. They comprised the nightly reports of the crew, and were thirty per cent of the real tally. Galt studied the figures and found them eminently satisfactory. "I'd like to have a few more foremen like you," he growled.

"What's the matter?" Jerry asked.

"Wish I knew. Hell's busted loose in the other three camps. The men smell something, and they're grouching to the foremen and finding fault with the logging roads and where the rollways are placed. Somebody's stirred 'em up."

He searched Jerry's face suspiciously. "None of that here?"

"Ask Ed," Jerry retorted.

"We're foolin' 'em straight through," the clerk agreed enthusiastically.

"If you've put foremen in the other camps like Scanlon, they're sure to smell a rat," Jerry said. "One man did say something yesterday, but he didn't speak, or work either, for an hour."

"You got rid of any of the old North men?"

"Don't need to. That's queering the game. You're getting too raw, Galt."

"I'm running things, feller."

"Yeh, and the way you are I'm not so sure I want to tie up with you. There's too much dynamite in this."

"Where? We can't lose, and we can't get caught. If these old-timers make too much trouble, I'll give 'em their time."

"And tell everybody what you're doing!" Jerry sneered. "Besides, what am I getting out of this? And how about old North coming back?"

"He won't. We get reports every week from the doctors, and North might just as well be dead as the way he is."

"Who's we? Listen, feller. I'm doing your dirty work for you and I'm the only one who's delivering the goods. You let me in on this, and show me where I come out, or I'm on a train to-morrow night."

Galt did not answer for a moment. He was troubled, and he had to have Jerry's help. Jerry could read that in his eyes.

"You don't have to know who 'we' are," Galt said at last.

"No? I've got to have something more than your word. You've let Jackson in, and Scanlon."

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"All right. You've guessed, it's Strain, and my only telling you it's him won't help you much. In the spring you'll get a thousand, cash."

"Three thousand, you mean." Jerry snarled. "What have you mortgaged? The West Fork timber?"

Galt nodded.

"The mill and what we're cutting now?"

"We've got to make a clean sweep."

"Sure! Sweep in a million! And offer me a thousand! So that's it. Tell Strain I get ten thousand or I'm gone. And I stop at White Pine on my way."

"All right! All right! But get down to Camp Three and earn it."

CHAPTER IV.

TRAPPED!

WHITE WATER DAN WHEELER had done his work well. Jerry was greeted with grins and winks in Camp Three. Freezing weather had not come and he was able to eliminate some disastrous grades in the logging roads and rearrange the rollways. The men were alert now to Galt's scheme and were able, without direction, to avoid many of the cunningly laid devices whereby they would have been delayed later.

It was a beautiful thing to watch, the loyalty and the skill of these men. Two hundred of them were scattered through four camps. Mingled with them were aliens, men who had never worked for Joe North and to whom a job was a job. Yet not one of the latter heard a suspicious statement or caught a surreptitious glance.

Galt came. He stormed up and down the tote road, from camp to camp, finding fault. He gave an excellent imitation of a harried walking boss upon whom rested the responsibility of a successful year. He abused and belittled, and Joe North's men listened and went about their business of defeating him.

Jim Galt's confidence in Jerry was complete. He tested him, examined tallies, and he was driven to believe by the very necessity of having something to which he might cling.

In all four camps the falling and skidding tallies were carefully scaled thirty per cent before being reported to the clerks each night. In Camps One and Two the foremen were openly derided. Men would not obey orders. They found fault with the judgment of their superiors. They even talked back to Galt when he abused them.

"I've got to get rid of those North men," Galt said to Jerry one night.

"Fire them."

"They're dynamite. They might even take the camps away from me."

"Trouble with you, Galt, you haven't any nerve. I'm not afraid of North's men, and they won't take a camp away from me. I'll go down to Camp Two and show 'em."

The freezing weather and snow held off. Again Jerry was able to straighten out a few grades in the logging roads. But back in Camps Three and Four Galt's new foremen were not successful. The lumberjacks laughed at them, and worked as they pleased.

In Camp Four Jerry had planted a little bomb. He touched it off with a message carried by a tote teamster. When Galt arrived and walked through the slash, Rory O'Keefe stopped him.

"Please, Mister Galt," he said obsequiously, "can I go down to White Pine and see Doc Atkinson about my eyes?"

"What's the matter with your eyes?" Galt snarled.

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"Something very bad. All the logging roads run up hill, the way it seems to me."

Several old North men had gathered around and they laughed uproariously and claimed a similar optical trouble. Galt faced them savagely.

"Go to town!" he shouted. "The lot of you. But get your time and don't come back."

"Yes, sir," they answered, and trooped away to camp.

But they did not pack their turkeys, and the next morning, when Galt had gone, they returned to work.

GALT was desperate now. Rory's reference to the logging roads was the most disturbing thing that had happened.

Up and down Beaver River he stormed. Lumberjacks were given time checks and told to go, and in the morning they were back at work. It was sabotage, open defiance. Foremen were helpless. Two were badly beaten. Rory O'Keefe succumbed to enthusiasm and chased the new foreman out of Camp Four.

"You're a grand crook!" Jerry scoffed when Galt told his troubles. "Why don't you bring in the sheriff and clean 'em out?"

"The law's the last thing I want in this," Galt retorted.

"You've got all the rights, with that power of attorney from Joe North."

"And I might play right into their hands. The men are not doing this alone. Somebody's put 'em up to it, somebody who knows what we're doing."

"Who can that be?"

"I don't know," Galt answered savagely, "but if I find out—"

In that moment Jerry understood how dangerous Galt could be. His was a big game, with huge stakes. The elimination of Ben Blair, Joe North's old walking boss, was the first step in his scheme, and Jerry knew that nothing short of murder could have accomplished that.

For the first time, the young man looked at Jim Galt from a new angle. He had known him to be cold and calculating. Now he saw that the man was capable of the utmost violence in the furthering of his plot.

"How about my going back to Camp Four?" Jerry suggested. "That's the worst bunch. I'll tame 'em."

"They'd kill you."

"Then close the camps."

"And turn 'em loose to talk. We can't let this thing get out. I don't even want any talk in White Pine. The thing to do is to find out what's back of them."

Jerry had little fear in that respect. The North crew could be trusted, and it was back of him to a man. But as a precaution, he sent word to each camp by the tote teamsters. These men, all old-timers in the North employ, served as his means of communication. They carried his orders and brought reports, not only from the camps but from Barlow, and several times, late at night, they had crept up to the windows of Strain's office and had seen Galt talking to Strain.

Galt continued his rounds of the camps. He no longer made a pretense of being the driven, harried walking boss. His abuse of the men had ceased. He talked to foremen, watched the work, went on. More and more he confided to Jerry, and asked advice, and as the days passed a plan formed in Jerry's mind, dazzling in its possibilities.

It was a simple scheme—to oust Galt as he had ousted Scanlon. Each

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day a break with Galt seemed more imminent, and it was the last thing Jerry wanted. With the camps in open revolt, Galt need only shut off the food supplies to regain control and install a new crew. Even the loyalty of Joe North's men could not prevail against empty storehouses.

But with Jerry acting as walking boss and Galt remaining in the background, it would be a simple thing to run the camps efficiently and report demoralization, to bank the full season's cut and show a scale of only twenty-five million on the rollways.

LATE one afternoon Galt drove into Camp Two from Barlow.

"Strain wants to see you," he said to Jerry. "Hop in and we'll be in Barlow by supper time."

Jerry hesitated. He suspected a trick to get him away from the protection of his father's men, but he saw, too, the opportunity for which he had been waiting. He wanted to talk to Strain. Galt no longer controlled the camps, and if Jerry could become walking boss in his place—

He was young, possessed of youth's confidence and recklessness. He believed he could handle himself in any trap Galt might set, and if there were no trap, a talk with Strain could mean victory. He climbed to the seat beside Galt.

Galt had little to say as they drove through the forest. The early darkness came. They passed a tote team, and Jerry greeted the driver.

"We ought to get rid of those fellows," Galt said.

"Sure," Jerry agreed. "Whatever's going on, they're carrying the word from camp to camp. But there's one other man we ought to get rid of first."

"Who's that?"

"Jim Galt. He's useless now. The North men know what he's doing. They only laugh at him. I'm going to tell Strain so."

"I think you're right," the walking boss assented readily. "They've about forced me into the open. It means you get my job."

"That what Strain wants of me?"

"I think so."

They went on in silence. Jerry considered Galt's words, each syllable, and each shade of intonation. The whole thing fitted too well with his plans. He searched the shadows ahead, was alert in his seat. But they drove into Barlow, and nothing had happened.

Galt turned the team over to the stableman and led the way to the office in the North warehouse. The room was dark. Galt threw open the door, and quickly stepped aside.

Men poured out. Jerry's first impression was of rats leaving a burning building. Simultaneously, he knew he should flee. But there was no time. The trap had been too well laid. Men darted out to head him off. In a moment he was surrounded.

Jerry did not wait for them to close in. He charged, feinted, slipped to one side, whirled and broke through the ring. An outthrust foot sent him headlong.

He was up in an instant, but they were upon him, striking, making full use of mass and weight and numbers, bearing him down at last, beating and kicking him. He was barely conscious when dragged into the office.

His hands and feet were bound. The men departed. A lamp was lighted and Jerry saw Galt beside it.

"What fool trick you up to now?" the young man demanded.

"You overlooked something," Galt answered. "Ed Jackson smelled a

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skunk at Camp Four. He figured the tote teamsters were carrying messages, so he hid in the stable nights and heard a lot. What's your game, feller?"

JERRY did not reply. He knew he was caught, but he did not believe Galt suspected who he was.

"What is it?" Galt repeated savagely. "I'm going to know if I have to beat you into telling."

"I told you coming in here," Jerry retorted. "If I'm going to play a crooked game, I want all I can get out of it. I'm after your job."

"Yeah? Then why did you take the grades out of the logging roads? And how about those fake tallies? You'd better come through."

"Sure. Bring Strain in here and I'll tell him what I told you on the tote road."

Galt ignored that. He grasped Jerry's shoulder and shook him violently.

"Going to tell me why you're doing this?" he demanded with sudden fury.

"I have."

"Oh, Mike!" Galt called.

The door opened and Scanlon came into the room.

"He won't talk," Galt said. "Take him out and work on him."

"I was in hopes he'd be stubborn and give me a chance," Scanlon chuckled.

"Go as far as you like, Mike. And if you can't get the truth out of him, he's no more use to us—or anybody else. Understand?"

"Leave that to me, Jim."

"And don't get lazy. Go where I told you to. North's hellions might come after him."

Scanlon grasped the collar of Jerry's shirt, pulled him across the room and into the dark warehouse beyond, on over the rough floor to a door. There he whistled, and out of the darkness came a team and tote wagon. Three men jumped off, tossed Jerry onto the rack, and he was driven away.

Blankets were thrown over him, and he could not see in which direction he was taken. Neither did he know how long he was on the way. After what seemed an interminable time the wagon stopped and he was dumped out onto the ground and dragged into a building. Even in the darkness he could see that it was a deserted logging camp.

Scanlon lighted a lantern and hung it from a beam. "Set him on that bench," he commanded.

Ankles tied together, wrists bound behind him, his face bloody from a torn scalp, Jerry was lifted to the seat. Scanlon stood before him, grinning.

"Make a monkey out of me, would you?" he chuckled, and drove a heavy fist into Jerry's face.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

The greatest mystery novel of the year—a story you will always remember—with its trail of grinning little gold skulls whose coming brought death to lonely atolls and to proud Singapore homes! Coming next week: "The Gold Skull Murders," by Frank L. Packard.

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Swiftly Brick wrenched away the gun

Mexican Crude

Queer things happen when justice and human nature clash, finds Brick Kennedy, one-man police force of an oil-town south of the Rio Grande

By WILLIAM E. BARRETT

THE flares of Mexico's newest and largest oil field were lighting the sky when Brick Kennedy rode the trail to Denton's. The red-headed special officer of the North American Petroleum Company rode grimly with an unlighted home-rolled cigarette hanging from his tight lips. For the first time since he'd worn the company star, a North American pay roll wagon had been knocked over. Brick took it as a personal affront.

Below him Petrolia sprawled like an unwashed squaw; a few dingy lights among a slovenly group of frame buildings that flanked a street of black mud. The road leading down to it curled and back-tracked on itself like a snarled length of drill cable. Kennedy swore softly.

"A man's a fool to work in a country like this, with a nation like the United States just north of him. Funny thing about fools, though. Most of 'em know it."

At the foot of the twisted trail he

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turned into the main drag of the disreputable oil town. The darkness was as thick as sump-hole scum, and the jostling figures in the street were visible only by grace of oil lamps that sputtered feebly behind grimy windows. A yellow glare down the drag marked the center of prosperity and of sin—Denton's. Brick's lips twisted wryly. In all Petrolia, Denton's was the only habitation of any kind that was fit to live in; the only clean, shining, comfortable spot within miles. And Denton's was—well one of those places.

Jazz music blared from the open door of the dance hall in back, and the light of an old Spanish ship's lantern reflected off the highly polished bar in front. Proud of that lantern, Denton was. He had a right to be. There were men in the States who wouldn't have shaken hands with Denton, but who would have paid him thousands for the lantern.

The man himself was behind the bar when Kennedy entered. Powerful in a lazy way and genial when it suited him, Denton was something of a force in the community. His eyebrows rose inquiringly as he spotted Brick; his hand reached lazily beneath the bar and a bottle made its appearance.

"I've heard o' places like mine that got along without cops," he said. "I never heard o' no cops that got along without places like mine. Have a drink!"

"Don't care if I do." Brick lounged against the bar and let his eyes wander carelessly over the room. His lips moved guardedly. "I'm looking for the man who knocked over our pay truck to-day, Denton. What do you know about it?"

Denton shrugged. "Should I know something?"

"Hostile, are you? Get over it. A lot more of that pay roll would have landed in your till with our gang of men spending than with just one man putting it out." Brick continued to survey the room. "You're selling something down here and filling a long-felt want.

"So is the company. A hi-jacker lives off people like a varmint, and doesn't fill any demand. You ought to be with us and against him. That's just horse sense."

Denton shook his head. "You're a clever cop, but I ain't a stool pigeon, mister."

BRICK did not answer. His eyes were fixed on one of the card tables against the wall. Drama seemed to be building up there and he could sense a blow-off.

Suddenly a khaki-clad husky leaped from his chair and hurled a pack of cards into the face of the man across the table from him.

"You double-blank blasted cheat!" he roared. "You been stealin' the eye teeth outa me."

The other came to his feet with a low growl. His hand swung downward and came up with a forty-five. Brick Kennedy was across the room in a flashing dive, five foot eight of red-headed ferocity that granted no superiority to the gunman's six feet of brawn.

Before the gun had cleared the table, Brick's hand fastened on it. With one quick twist he tore it from the big man's hand.

"A bad toy, that, for a drunk," he said softly. "I don't think you better have it."

"Thass aw ri'. You gimme that gun!" The big man advanced threateningly with hunched shoulders. "You

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ain't got no business with me. I ain't no oil company man. I'm a wild-catter."

Denton had come around the counter now. He stepped in front of Brick and his big fist lashed to the wild-catter's jaw.

"I've got business with you, you double-blank scum!" he roared. "This is my place and nobody pulls a gun in here."

The blow caught the wild-catter on the button, and he passed out on his feet.

Denton caught the limp body as it plunged forward and with the dexterity of long practice shifted it until he had a collar and belt grip. The next minute Mr. Wild-catter was sailing through the front door on his way to the gutter.

Kennedy shrugged and stepped over to the counter. He laid the forty-five down.

"Use your own judgment whether he gets it back or not," he said. "You know him better than I do."

"Yeah—I know him. Runs a two-bit wild cat over the other side of the ridge. Name's Len Taine." Denton poured himself a drink. As he tossed it he turned to Brick. "A deuce of a fine cop job you've got," he said sympathetically. "You can't pinch nobody who don't work for the company, and if you get this pay roll hi-jacker you will have to call in thirty cents' worth of Mexican soldiers to make your pinch legal. That's swell."

Brick Kennedy's teeth clicked.

"Don't kid yourself. That's the technical way of looking at it." His eyes became agate pools. "I'm the only law there is in Petrolia or thirty miles any direction. I'm making anybody that doesn't believe it like it."

"Good for you." Denton's voice was lazy again. "I like your nerve and I'm for you."

THE swinging half-door that led to the drag slapped open, and a tall, straight figure stood framed there for an instant. Brick turned like a flash. His lips pursed in a whistle.

"'Holy' Howe!"

The newcomer bore down on the bar in a fury.

"There was a man, a human being, thrown into that filthy gutter a few minutes ago!" he charged. "Thrown into the street after spending his money in your filthy den!"

Denton raised his eyebrows.

"Yeah? Well, brother, if I recollect the circumstances, the guy was all through actin' like a human bein' before he got heaved out." The dive keeper gestured carelessly with a thick thumb. "The cop here will tell you about it."

The man who was known in Petrolia as 'Holy' Howe looked with hostile eyes at Brick Kennedy. Brick looked embarrassed. He had nothing against the self-appointed evangelist of the oil camps, but he did not want to be dragged into a debate with him. His experience had been that preachers of Howe's kind were a fanatical lot; a harder proposition by far than a pack of law-breakers. Brick used bullets better than he used words.

"This is no place for an officer of the law." Howe's voice was harsh. "A man who can condone brutality and liquor swigging should not wear the star."

Denton growled. "Bosh! When a filthy bum pulls a gun in my place I throw him out. That's my business. I don't mess with your affairs. Leave mine alone."

Howe's face was white and Brick

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Kennedy had to confess admiration for the man's courage. It was not easy to stand alone against a renegade town, nor to blast a dive keeper with words in his own dive.

Howe had turned to the room.

"You men," he said, "should see what comes of frequenting such dives as this. Go look out in the gutter. That's the end of violence, sin and lust. The wages of—"

Denton came around the bar, his brows wrinkled with rage.

"You look in the gutter yourself!" he roared. "That dirty wild-catter I heaved out is the only producer out o' the four of us; you and me and the cop here are livin' off the community. We're all dead weight in the boat. The working men support us all. You got the devil's own nerve bawling me out."

The man known as Holy Howe turned deliberately away.

"I'll never rest," he said, "until I close this den of evil and violence."

The half-doors swung and he was swallowed up in the flooding human tide that rolled down the drag. Denton stared at the place where he had been and cursed.

"I've got no room for a milk-drinkin' ninny of a Bible thumber," he growled. "That preachin' guy makes me sick."

Brick Kennedy lighted a cigarette. "He might make you sicker if he believed in violence," he said thoughtfully. "He's got a lot of sand."

The dive keeper continued to stare resentfully at the swinging half-doors. Kennedy leaned across the counter.

"Denton," he said slowly, "every one of those bills that disappeared today had an X worked into the engraving. I'll be a grateful hombre if you let me know when they start coming in."

Denton stiffened. He raised his eyes slowly.

"And if I don't let you know?"

Brick Kennedy looked into challenging eyes, eyes that still smoldered with resentment toward Holy Howe. Brick's eyes met the challenge with a smile.

"I think you'll tell me," he said, not caring whether Denton guessed what weapon he would use to back up the words. With a hitch at his wide belt, he turned and sauntered through the swinging halves.

Denton was not concerned. He had something else in mind. He watched Brick go, then turned to his cash register and ran his fingers over something there which brought a wide grin to his face.

"It is too bad," he said, "that I keep such a sinful place. It is very much too bad. It sure is!"

BEYOND the glare of Denton's, Petrolia spread blackly. Occasional lanterns swinging from unpainted poles constituted the street lighting system. There was not even a board sidewalk. The soft earth gave under foot with a squishy sound. Oil towns—even boomers—had usually a measure of civic pride; Petrolia had none. It was not a part of the oil development; it merely lived on it like a kept thing.

Brick Kennedy strode purposefully through the mixed crowd that milled along the gloomy street. At the south end of the drag there was a truck depot and the Oil Well Supply Company had a brick warehouse beside the unloading platform. This warehouse was an oil man's club. Those who did not go to Denton's congregated at the warehouse where the yarns of the field were swapped. Here each night Smackover

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and Burkburnett and Spindletop and Seminole were on the roar again as tale matched tale and pipes glowed in the darkness.

It was there that Brick found Jack Howe, as he had expected to find him. The son of Petrolia's self-appointed evangelist rose in response to a signal from the man with the star. He and Brick had known each other for a year. The boy had been a clerk in the cashier's office when Brick first joined the company.

"What's on your mind, Brick?" Jack Howe's usual smile was absent. Brick noted that he looked a bit drawn, worried.

"It's your dad, Jack. He's going to get in trouble. He's declared war on Denton and he can't lift it, boy. It's too big a job. He'll lose a lot of influence and he may lose more than that."

The two men were moving away from the warehouse. Jack Howe bit his lip.

"I know," he said, "but he won't listen to me." He gave an embarrassed laugh. "I wish I was as good a man as he is; yet I can't get along with him. He's usually got some kind of a grip on the truth, but the proportions are mixed some way."

Brick was frowning. His duties as officer extended only to the affairs of the North American Company, but he felt a responsibility for every American in this hybrid Mexican town. Particularly he felt responsible for the headstrong man who had come down to be a bookkeeper and who had stayed to be an evangelist.

"What your father doesn't see," he said slowly, "is that he's just banging his head up against a source of supply when he tackles Denton. His quarrel isn't with Tex, it's with human nature. If he could stop the demand for what Denton has, he wouldn't have to close Denton's. Denton would close it."

THEY were walking slowly down the dark street. A shaft of light from one of the pole-hung lanterns fell across them. There was a hoarse curse from the shadows and a man lurched forward. His hand gripped Brick's shoulder and twirled him around. Kennedy recognized the wild-catter, Taine, who had been thrown out of the saloon.

"Gimme my gun!" he growled. Brick brushed the hand off with a quick flip. Jack Howe stepped forward and interposed his big frame between the two men.

"If you're looking for a fight, Bucky," he said quietly, "try me. The captain isn't your size except in man power. And he's a whole lot bigger there."

With an oath, the wild-catter threw his right; a powerful roundhouse swing that Howe avoided neatly. The youngster's left flicked out and caught the other off balance. Taine went down in the mud and bounced back cursing. Jack Howe met him and traded punches in a wild mêlée that stopped traffic on the drag and brought the floating population of Petrolia to the spot on the double quick.

Brick, after an involuntary gesture of protest, stepped back. Jack was right. It was an even match. Pound for pound the men were equals and there was scarcely a fraction of an inch difference in height or reach.

The fight was short and bitter. Taine seemed to have shaken off most of the effects of his liquor and there was a viciousness in him that very nearly balanced Howe's superior skill. Battling in and out of the shadows the

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two struggled for advantage. Jack got it. With a sudden charge, Taine swept through the youngster's guard and smashed a right to the chin. Jack went down like a shot and the wild-catter jumped in with his boots. That was his big mistake.

The youngster rolled over and came to his feet like a rubber ball bounding from the concrete. His thigh brushed the wild-catter's upraised leg and Taine lost his balance momentarily. Momentarily was enough. Jack's fist shot hard and true to the button and, for the second time that night the wild-catter passed into the realm of oblivion.

Young Howe stepped back and grinned as he wiped the blood from his lips.

"Wonder what dad would have thought of that?" he said cheerfully.

Brick shook his head.

"I don't know. All I can say is that you did a better job on him than Denton did."

The crowd was pressing close and the two men elbowed their way through and passed into the concealing darkness of the upper drag. Brick stuck out his hand.

"Thanks," he said. "The guy was bigger than I am. I'll do something for you some day." He didn't mention that he had been a Texas Ranger and that odds meant nothing in his life. It didn't seem appropriate.

Jack Howe took the hand the ex-Ranger held out to him. His voice became suddenly grave.

"I may let you do something for me," he said soberly. "I haven't been doing so well since the company canned me."

Brick was silent. He knew that young Howe had been let out of his job with the North American Company for general inefficiency and that Sarles, the superintendent, was convinced that he would never be worth a whoop. The company offered about the only chance a white man had of employment within striking distance of Petrolia.

"Hope dad doesn't hear about this little brawl," said Jack. "I wouldn't care—"

The youngster's voice died out, and Brick followed the boy's eyes. They had come within the radius of another pole-hung lantern, and an unshaved individual in a greasy khaki shirt was beckoning from the fringe of the lighted area. With a hasty apology, Jack took his leave. Brick gazed thoughtfully after him.

"That was Joe Higgins from Denton's," he said slowly. "Now what is the kid mixed up with that bunch for?"

PETROLIA, ugly enough in the darkness, was uglier still in the blaze of noon when every dirty corner and every weather-seamed board was outlined boldly. On the up-slope of ground in the distance stood the black rigs of the oil country and through the squalid town an endless procession of trucks made their way; pipe, casings, rig lumber, steel machinery and cable bound for the humming field. Industry toiled on the hill and indolence and indifference dozed in the sprawled town, and the two were inseparable from the oil frontier.

To-day there was a new topic of conversation in Petrolia, and Brick Kennedy found gesturing groups on all of the corners when he rode his big bay in from the field. He stopped near one of the groups and swung down from the saddle. A neatly lettered sign was tacked to the pine post which did duty as a light standard in the evening. The

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ex-Ranger read it through with mixed emotions.

WHOSE MONEY DO YOU SPEND AT DENTON'S?

Have you a wife and children back in the States depending upon your earnings? Or an aged mother and father?

Think of them when you take your hard earned money to the gambling table and the saloon.

Similar signs were stuck up in dozens of places and Brick visioned the work that it took to make them; hard gruelling hours of careful pen lettering with only the light of an oil lamp. A man who could subject his old eyes to such a strain was sincere if nothing else, and the ex-Ranger kicked the pebbles under his feet irritably. What did the man stand to gain by it all?

He strode up the street to Denton's and found Denton himself in a vile mood. The usual lazy smile and careless good nature were gone. In their place a frown sat like a thundercloud upon the broad face and the heavy lips curled back from his white teeth.

"What's the matter, Denton? Not letting a few signs get you steamed up and murderous, are you?"

The dive keeper's eyes narrowed. "Listen. It ain't the signs. I can laugh any sky pilot out of existence. But that guy is making my business look wrong. Everybody knows there's got to be saloons and dance halls where there a lot of men working hard and scarcely any women. Sure!"

Brick nodded thoughtfully. Denton leaned on the bar. You know as well as I do, cop, that if there wasn't places like mine, the company would start some. They'd have to or the men wouldn't stay here and work. Then along comes this guy with his signs and makes me look like a baby robber. He don't care, does he, if they put the baby's money in his collection plate? I'll say he don't!"

"I think you have him wrong, Tex." Brick was struggling with a thought that he couldn't quite grasp himself. "He doesn't see your business the way you do." He pulled on a cigarette and ran his eyes down the bar as though seeking inspiration. "Going to your saloon wouldn't hurt a guy that was all right inside. I was a Ranger for ten years, Tex, and most of the guys I saw that went wrong were headed that way anyhow."

Tex Denton was scarcely listening. His eyes glowered at the glass in front of him and his hand closed tightly around the stem; only to relax again as suddenly as it closed.

"That guy is so darn good he can go after me, is he?" he snarled. "He can print up cute signs and get my customers to kiddin' me about tappin' the till on widders and orphans. All right. All right. I guess maybe I can clean his house for him. You want to know who pulled those solo stick-ups, don't you? You want to know who's spendin' marked money? All right. Keep an eye on Jack Howe if you want a tip—and ta hell wit' yuh!"

Brick felt as though he'd been tapped on the button, but his expression never changed. Jack Howe! The kid had fought for him last night and he'd promised to reciprocate the favor some time. What if Denton was telling the truth? Brick turned toward the door.

"Much obliged, Tex," he said genially. "I'll remember that."

BRICK'S face was grim as he made his way through the milling mob along the drag. That marked money had been his one sure card in trailing the hold-up man. He had been

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certain that it would find its way into Petrolia and he had tipped off every merchant he could trust in the town. He had trusted Denton, but the open warfare staged by the elder Howe against the dive keeper did not make Denton an ideal witness for the prosecution.

A big mud-plastered car swept around the corner from the oil field road as Brick started across the street to the supply company warehouse. With screaming brakes it slithered to the edge of the foot path and an imperative voice called:

"Oh, Kennedy! Come here, will you?"

Brick turned with a start.

Old Henry Sarles, general superintendent of the company, was leaning out of the side window of the muddy coupé.

"Kennedy!" The superintendent's voice was curt. "Giles Turner died an hour ago. The charge against that heister you're trailing is murder."

Sarles was digging in his pocket as he spoke. "The fellow pulled another stick-up this morning, the Ridge supply depot. Manson got a good look at him. Here's a description. Now get him—and get him quick!"

The gears meshed and the big car roared away. Brick stared at the bit of paper in his hand.

> Masked man. Soiled khaki. Leather puttees. Gray shirt. Six feet tall. Weight about 180 pounds.

Brick shook himself. "Jack Howe to a T," he muttered. He recalled the youth's air of dejection, his lack of a job and his familiarity with pay roll procedure at the company. The pieces fitted together like a perfectly assembled jig-saw puzzle.

A voice hailed from the loading platform. Terry Kane of the supply company was coming toward him. His face, too, bore a look of unusual gravity. Without the customary exchange of pleasantries he drew Brick to one side.

"I got one of your bills, Brick," he said grimly. "The cross marks are worked into the engraving like you said. I didn't notice them till he'd gone."

Brick felt a premonition. "Who gave them to you, Terry?"

The oil man kicked a pebble with his foot.

"Jack Howe did, Brick," he said slowly, "and damned if I'd say a word if I hadn't given you a promise."

"Where did he go?" Brick's voice was hard.

"Out the oil field road. Eearly this morning, it was. Said he had a job."

With muffled thanks Brick turned away. There was no hesitation in his movements now. If Jack Howe had gone out the oil field road in the early morning it was perfectly possible for him to have stuck up the Ridge depot. The case was no longer a search for clews; it was a man hunt.

HIS first stop was the little pine shack where Jack lived with his father. The elder Howe opened the door; a haggard man this morning, white-faced and red-eyed.

"I want to see your son." Brick's voice was curt. The man before him was due to get hurt eventually, and Brick did not believe that the slow infliction of an inevitable hurt was merciful. He was prepared to face the whole issue at once. The self-appointed evangelist drew himself very straight.

"I have no son," he said.

"Huh?" Brick was jolted out of his usual self-control.

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"Last night I was heckled by a man in the crowd as I was speaking." The old man's voice was very weary. "He said that my own son was playing cards at Denton's. I named him a liar, but I was wrong."

Howe's voice almost died away. Then it came back and there was a power in it; the power of a man who sways audiences as a profession. "My work was u n d o n e in that moment when I found my son in that cesspool of vice. I was betrayed. Now, I have no son!"

The door banged and Brick blinked. Slowly he turned away.

"Playing cards at Denton's! Huh! Higgins called him when he was walking with me. Now, I wonder what Jack's up to?"

With long strides the former Ranger made for Denton's. Denton himself was at the bar when he entered, and Brick wasted no time on preliminaries.

"Tex," he said, "you gave me a hot tip. I've got more evidence connecting Jack Howe with that pay roll heist. Now I want to find him."

Something very like a gleam of exultation passed across Denton's coarse features, but he shrugged indifferently. "How should I know where he is?"

"Because Giles Turner, who was shot in the stick-up, died this morning.

Denton stiffened. "Huh, died?" For a second the dive keeper seemed taken aback, then his thick lips curled. "A murder rap," he muttered. "Now won't that curl that Bible thumber! Won't it, though?"

"Never mind that. Where's Jack Howe?" Brick's eyes were narrow slits now in a face that was gone suddenly hard. Tex Denton reached for his coat.

"I'll take you out there," he said. "He's got a job at Taine's wild cat."

It was Brick's turn to be startled. "Taine's? When did he get big-hearted and start giving out jobs to men who'd slapped him down?"

Denton grinned as he shook himself into his coat and made for the door.

"Late last night," he said, "he came back for his gun, and he was a changed man. Full of milk and philanthropy, he was."

Brick didn't comment. The wheels were turning slowly within his logical mind. As relentlessly as a perfectly tuned machine that mind was discarding those facts which did not fit the pattern of his case.

"I'll be glad to have you run me out, Tex," he said. "I wasn't going to take you up on it at first, but I've changed my mind. It would be kind of amusing to have you along."

The dive keeper shook his wide shoulders in a rumbling laugh as he made for the long car that was parked beside his building.

"That's what I t h o u g h t," he chuckled.

ON the dusty ride out to the wild cat Denton waxed voluble. He gloated aloud over his coming triumph. The evangelist had declared war on him, and the war had not lasted long. Howe's posters wouldn't look so good with young Jack facing a murder rap as a gun-toting bandit.

Brick Kennedy slumped in the seat and chewed industriously on a jaw full of plug. He had not taken sides in the war between Denton and Howe, because he had not believed that there were any sides to take. By the very nature of the argument there could be nothing decisive proven. Now, however, there was something indecent

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about Denton's bragging. Brick looked forward to doing something about it, although he confessed to a liking for the dive keeper. Denton had his points.

At last they came within sight of the well; a dilapidated wooden rig with a noisy donkey engine. An unpainted shack stood beyond the engine. On the plank bench of the drilling platform Jack Howe was sitting with his eyes fixed indifferently on the thumping cable which rose and fell monotonously with every movement of the rocker arm.

Denton elected to stay in the car, where he was shadowed by the top. Brick swung down and Jack Howe came to his feet as the ex-Ranger crossed the muddy flat by the sump hole.

"Hello, old timer!" he called out. "Gosh, I must have been asleep! I never heard you drive up. What are you doing out here?"

Brick had a sudden hunch. "Just looking things over, son. Thought I'd like to see what you've got here. How far is she down?"

"I don't know. I asked Taine last night and he didn't tell me. Kinda secretive cuss."

Brick's eyes met those of the younger man sternly. "Why didn't you tell me about this job proposition last night instead of sliding off the way you did?"

Jack Howe looked away. "Well, I didn't know Taine was the guy had the job for me. All I knew about it was what Denton told me yesterday afternoon. After I found out it was Taine last night, I hated to tell you."

Brick turned away as though he had lost interest in the inquiry. He looked over the cable with keen eyes and walked back to the puffing engine.

"Just what is your job, Jack?" he asked indifferently.

The younger man shook his head hopelessly.

"Darned if I know. Taine is just figuring on taking a little trip and he says he wants some one here to watch the rig."

"Fine. Where did you learn about drilling oil wells?"

"I didn't, and I told him that. He says to just watch the boilers and if something goes wrong, shut the whole works off. I'm not sure I'd know about it if things did go wrong, but I do need a job."

"Things won't. This, my son, is the nearest approach to a fool-proof oil well that I have ever seen. I—"

The boy started guiltily. "Oh, yes, I'm not supposed to let any one near the well, either. I just didn't think about you and—"

"Hey, you!" There was a roar from the direction of the little hut twenty-five yards or so away. Brick turned. "Get away from that well! I don't want no spies up here from the other companies!"

Taine was pulling on a greasy gray shirt as he ran. Brick stood his ground quietly.

"No secret patents, are there?"

"None o' your business if there is or not. Yo're trespassin', on my property." The wild-catter turned to young Howe with a snarl. "I thought I told you to keep everybody away from here."

"That's all right. I've got business here." Brick was moving forward, his jaw suddenly hard.

"You've got nothing here. You're nothin' but a damned spy fer North American Pete."

Taine's hand dropped to his gun butt as he snarled the accusation. With a cross draw so fast that it made the wild-catter blink, Brick cleared his own

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gun. Taine was covered, with his forty-five still in the holster.

"AS I remarked" — Brick's voice was quietly controlled—"I came out here on business." His gun swung an arc from Taine to Jack Howe. "I came out to arrest Jack Howe for the murder of Giles Turner, paymaster of the company."

The boy gave a sudden cry and took a quick step forward. Even Taine looked startled. Tex Denton eased his big body out of the car and made his way toward the drilling platform. There was a hum along the road that told of a car being driven hard. The eyes of the group turned toward that car; all but the eyes of Brick Kennedy. Brick was not taking any chances of having the play taken away from him.

With screeching brakes the car came to a stop within ten feet of the drilling platform. Holy Howe was out of the driver's seat before the dust cloud had settled. He was panting a little as though he had run a race.

"Kane let me have his car!" he gasped. "I came as fast as I could, Jack. He told me what you'd done. I wanted to stand by you. I—"

"What I'd done?" Young Howe's face set hard. Brick interposed.

"The charge is murder, Mr. Howe," he said grimly, "but I have made no arrest yet."

"Murder?" The old man seemed to wilt, then his shoulders straightened. "It makes no difference. I will stand by my own flesh and blood."

Jack Howe moved away from him. Brick waved to the plank bench.

"Sit down, all of you," he said. "I've got a say-so, and you'll listen to it."

Taine protested, but he was waved down. Denton pulled him down on the bench beside himself. The two Howes sat together, but the younger man's lips were drawn tight. Brick twirled his gun thoughtfully and slipped it back in his holster.

"I have here a description of the heister who stuck up our ridge depot to-day," he said slowly. "Before I read it I'll remind you of something which you probably all know. North American pay roll money is marked. Jack Howe passed some of that money last night or this morning."

Jack started to his feet, but as his father groaned dejectedly he subsided, his face hard. Brick paid no attention to the by-play. In level tones he read the description of the heister as supplied by the company man on the ridge.

Holy Howe's look of horror was sufficient proof of the fact that the description tallied well with young Jack's appearance. Brick folded the paper.

"Denton," he said, "you knew that payroll money was marked because I told you."

Denton grinned. "Sure! I tipped you off soon as I got some of it."

"NO you didn't!" Brick's voice cracked like a pistol shot. "There was some of that money in your till while I was talking to you. You discovered it after I went out." He paused. "And after Mr. Howe went out. That afternoon you called Jack here about a job."

"Say, am I on trial? If I am, make a pinch!" Denton was crouched belligerently on the edge of the bench.

Brick's eyes were cold. "No. You're not on trial, but you ought to be. Jack Howe won marked money in your place and you deliberately arranged for him to win it."

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Denton came to his feet with a roar.

"Say, do you want to claim I had anythin' to do with them robberies?" There was a marked restlessness on the bench now. Brick snapped his fingers.

"Ah, soak your head, Tex! You know that I know better. You're not the heister type. But you knew where the marked money came from, and you planted it on Jack for revenge on his father. You got him a job to take him out of town and tighten the noose of suspicion—and you'd have let him hang. The job you got him ruined your scheme."

The ex-Ranger paused. His eyes narrowed and he seemed to balance on the balls of his feet.

"The job was substituting for a man who runs a dummy wild-cat well as an alibi; a well that makes a lot of noise and does not go down into the ground . . . Sit down, Taine!"

The big wild-catter crouched forward on the bench and Brick's voice cracked as he faced him. "A man who matches Jack Howe inch for inch in build; and who dresses like him and who killed Giles Turner—"

With a snake-like movement the wild-catter dipped down and jerked a gun from the holster of Tex Denton, who had resumed his place on the bench beside him. Brick's body twisted with the same motion that it took to clear his gun. Both guns boomed simultaneously with a dull roar. With a whistling gasp, Taine pitched forward on his face and slipped down between the dazed evangelist and Tex Denton. For a second no one moved. Then the dive keeper dropped on one knee and raised the man's head. He let it drop immediately with a dull thud.

"Dead center," he said unemotionally. "He went out like a light."

Jack Howe was on his feet and gazing dazedly at Denton. Brick was running his finger through a hole in his loose jacket and Holy Howe was down on the floor fumbling about Taine's body for a semblance of life. Jack broke the tense silence.

"Denton, would you really have let me take a jolt when you knew that you planted the evidence on me?"

Denton looked up with surprise.

"Sure! Wouldn't any one? You didn't mean any more to me than I did to your father. He didn't care what he did to me."

"No! You're wrong! I wouldn't ever have hurt you!" The old man's voice came from the depths of a badly shocked soul. "It was the evil you represented; the—"

"Yeah. You had a whole lot more belief in how wicked my place was than in how good your son was, didn't you?"

The old man caught his breath as he struggled to his feet and his son dropped a protective arm across the thin shoulders.

"Dad fought for what he thought was right," he said. "Would you?"

Denton grinned.

The self-appointed apostle to Petrolia passed a trembling hand across a wet forehead.

"I was mistaken," he said. "There are people here who are in no danger from your saloon. More people will follow their example. My work is with them."

His chin was up once more and there was a purpose in his face that would not admit defeat. Denton shrugged indifferently and the shrug indicated that he considered himself somehow victorious in a battle of intangibles. Brick Kennedy nonchalantly lighted a cigarette.

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"Tex," he said, "framing the kid here was pretty raw. You interfered with the course of justice. The only place to slap you is right in the pocketbook.

"You're fined twice the amount of the marked bills that cleared through your till."

"What?" Denton's voice was a roar. "Why, you tin-star copper, you can't fine me! You couldn't collect in a million years."

"No?" Brick blew the ash from his cigarette. "If I recall the conversation correctly, you said yourself that the company would open a place like yours if yours did not exist. It could anyway, you know."

There was a quiet threat in the drawling voice, and Tex Denton read his man aright. Unless he paid the fine levied, the former Ranger would not rest until he had cost Denton many times the amount of the fine. With a deep curse, Denton surrendered.

Brick Kennedy grinned.

"My case is finished, Tex," he said softly. His hand indicated the sprawled body of the wild-catter. "We can call in that thirty cents' worth of Mexican soldiers most any time now. They can have what's left."

THE END.

Museum in a Monument

NOT many people who daily pass along the Thames Embankment in London know the history of Cleopatra's Needle. Fewer still are aware of the fact that when it was erected in 1878 a number of articles were placed inside the pedestal in two jars for the edification of posterity.

Egyptian kings were wont to inscribe a record of their virtues and achievements on the sides of the Needle when it adorned the portals of the Temple of Heliopolis. A parchment copy of Dr. Birch's translation of these hieroglyphics is to be found inside the Needle, together with copies of the Bible in several languages, and a translation into no fewer than 215 languages of the sixteenth verse of the third chapter of St. John.

Touching on articles of everyday use, there are also to be found inside a Bradshaw's railway guide, a case of cigars, pipes, etc., articles of female adornment, a London directory, a copy of Whitaker's Almanac, a box of hairpins, a child's feeding bottle, and toys of all kinds.

Photographs of a dozen pretty Englishwomen were included, as well as copies of daily and illustrated papers of the day. Of more than ordinary interest is the inclusion of a complete set of British coinage and a two-foot rule.

Among the remainder of articles placed inside the obelisk were a portrait of Queen Victoria, a memorial printed on vellum giving an account of the removal of the Needle from its ancient site to its present position, together with plans of the various arrangements made at the time to facilitate its transportation; some jars of Doulton ware, and last but not least, a map of London.

Kenneth P. Wood.

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Through a slit Shorty could see the Arabs closing in

The Burning Road

It was a duel of courage from the day the colonel of that Foreign Legion outfit asked driver Shorty Graw for speed—a duel with a wholly unforeseen victory

By ROBERT CARSE

Author of "Out of Yesterday," "Mob," etc.

Novelette—Complete

CHAPTER I.

WINNER.

GRAW came into that last corner by the Casino wide open. Rezzi, the long, lean Italian who had beaten him the week before in the Paris-Nice race, was on his left hand, close in against the curb. He could see the Italian's face now, turned swiftly toward his, streaked with grease and sweat inside his white racing helmet.

Graw laughed, then cursed, slamming his job at the corner.

"Afraid, huh, Rezzi? Afraid you'll hit the curbing. Well, you will!"

He did not speak any more; he did not look at the Italian. He slid farther down in the hot leather of the seat and whacked both feet upon clutch and brake. Rubber screamed then, and in his hands the big white-taped steering wheel of his Bugatti jumped and twisted while he fought it back and down. But he was around that cor-

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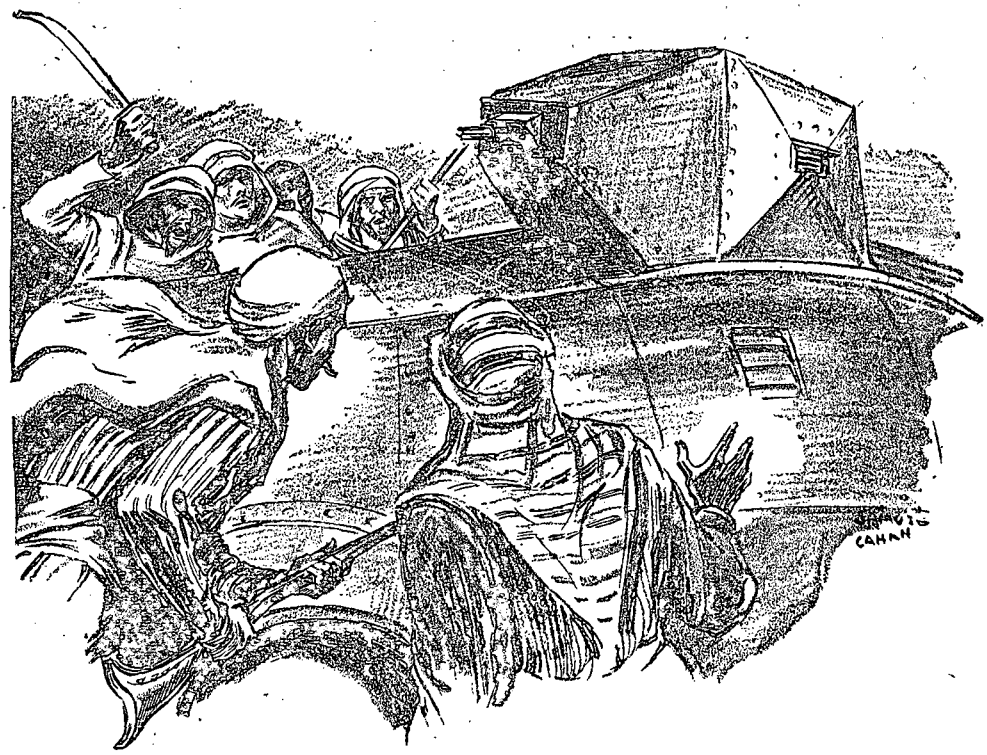

ner now, and ahead of him was the white cord of the finish line, and behind another screaming sound, that from the crowd, as Rezzi hit the curbing, blew a tire, skidded full across the narrow roadway, and almost into the steps of the Casino and the crowd.

As Graw leaned forward to cut his switch, he grinned: it was his now; he had won. Won the Monte Carlo Road Race, and won plenty chips.

He repeated the same words two hours later when he stood in the bar of the Casino. They had just figured up and given him his check—thirty-seven laps that he had led, and on top of that, the first prize, which he had walked into when Rezzi had lost his nerve and cracked on the corner.

Rezzi was behind him now, Rezzi and a lot of the others, some of the judges of the committee, some of the drivers and fans who had bet big. Glass in hand he turned, pressing one foot against the bar rail, so that they could see him above the others.

"How about it?" he asked hoarsely in English; "how about another drink with Shorty Graw?"

Hornby, the fat and red-faced English driver, was close to him, leaned forward and placed a restraining hand on his arm.

"Steady on, you," he whispered, showing bad, yellow teeth as he smiled. "Ain't enough enough? These mokes, 'as they bought you more'n one? They 'as not. An' you got the road back yet, you got the road into Nice. Steady, Yank, leave be, an' stay 'ere for the night. She's a bad 'un, that road down t' Nice. You're a bit—"

Quickly, Graw reached out; his hands caught the little cockney by the

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shoulders, lifted him bodily up and aside.

"Steady yourself," he said in his hoarse, quick voice, "and see how you like it! I'm bound for Nice; I got mine and I go."

He started to move with that, forward through the crowd. Others, many of them, tried to stop him, talk with him, tell him that it would be better if he stayed here, in Monte Carlo, for the night. He handled them, those who came close enough to him, as he had handled Hornby. And after a few minutes of it he stood alone before the darkened side door of the Casino, looking down at the low, snub-nosed, underhung job which had won for him that day.

Standing there, he talked to it, almost as he would talk to another man, and a close friend:

"Hung it on 'em to-day, didn't we, kid? Showed these guys that an American can twist these short races as well as the rest? Huh? Well, anyhow we go. To the devil with this town. Me, I'm fed up. And a little drunk, too. Sure. But we'll get there, baby, we'll hit Nice on the nose. And then Paree, huh, and New York. Come on, roll, baby, roll!"

SOMEWHERE down at the foot of the hill, in the Condamine, a *gendarme* waved a white stick and shrieked at him to stop. But he just laughed at that man and went on, pushing the button closer to the floor. After that, he noticed no man on foot, and very few cars.

His intention when he had left the Casino had been to take the Grande Corniche, the high, narrow, dangerous and beautiful road which flanked the mountains above him now. But he was not quite that drunk now. Anyhow, he told himself, there wasn't enough flat up there to do your stuff; not even on the Lower Corniche. This, the shore road, was the place. Boy—look at the face of that guy driving the truck! Almost into the telegraph pillar, hey, Frenchie? Well, almost is good enough.

The rest of that drive from then on, even the end of it, was a dark, dim sort of dream. He remembered driving, of course, and driving wide open, as fast as she would take it. But, that, to him, was as common and as easy as breathing. If a bit more dangerous.

The man and car he hit coming out of Villefranche and on the last lap into Nice, he never really saw. He saw the side road, and the swift, yellow stab of the headlights on his right side and a little in front, and that was all. He heard the other's brakes; he heard his own. In a sort of jerking flash he could recall the other car skidding, jumping the rough, rotten macadam and the car tracks, then skidding back, just as he, laughing, cursing, tried to wing on through.

What happened afterward, his lawyer, a smart American, told him in the ward of the Nice city hospital at St. Roch, a watchful *gendarme* seated beside the bed.

"Almost killed the other man—killed him from fright. Broke one leg. He's the son of the mayor of Villefranche, young chap with a wife and two or three kids. What? Yes, of course it looks bad. What? Bail, yes. But it will take about all that prize money you won in Monte Carlo. The local French papers, and the Villefranche mayor have been making quite a thing out of it: 'Drunken American.' 'Utter disregard of law, of advice.' 'Are the roads of France to be made into permanent race tracks for mad or

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drunken foreigners?' 'The example, the precedent, must be established now.'"

"Yeah." Graw twitched his unbruised shoulder on the hard pillow. "Baloney! This copper here," he jerked his head toward the staring *gendarme*, "he speak any English?"

"No."

"Good." Graw almost grinned. "What we going to do about it, then?"

The smart lawyer almost smiled, too.

"One of two things. But, you're not the sort to take handily to eighteen months or two years in prison, so that's out. The other is this: quietly pay off the injured man, and his family, with all you've got. And right now I'll tell you they want plenty. Then I'll get you out on bail, and you—"

"Yeah." Graw did grin. "Where to? Home? The States?"

The lawyer's face had become tense, serious, his voice grave.

"No." He looked quickly at the *gendarme*, and then away again. "There has been too much violent and unfavorable publicity for you to do that; the French government would find it necessary to make an appeal to the State Department as soon as you entered any American port, and then you would be in for it... How much money have you got?"

"How much money do you want?"

"Well, according to the reports in the papers, and to the demands made upon me for you, I'll need just about all your prize money from that Monte Carlo race."

"Uh-huh." Graw was still smiling. "That, and my buggy which won it for me, were just about all I had."

"You mean you're broke, or will be?"

"You were right the first time."

"But—"

"Leave out them 'buts' and listen to me: how soon do I get out of this joint?"

"In less than a week; you're suffering from nothing but severe bruises."

"All right, in less than two weeks I'll be over there in Africa and trying out that outfit they call the Foreign Legion. I hear it's tough; well, so is Shorty Graw."

"Yes." The lawyer had risen to his feet. "I believe both. And I think that after the initial shock of the irresistible force of Shorty Graw against the immovable object of the Legion, both will get along very well. Now, good night; I'll be around to-morrow and bring a check for you to sign. By the way, Oran is a free port, and a man, even a man named Graw, would not need a passport there."

CHAPTER II.

AN ACCIDENT.

TEN days later, as he had been promised, Shorty Graw stood in a native bazaar in the African city of Oran. Twelve days later he stood in the white and terrible heat of the main drill field of the Legion at Sidi-bel-Abbes. He was, he told himself, meeting what his smart lawyer in Nice had called the immovable object. Slowly, beneath the sweat-lined dust on his face, he grinned; if this was the Legion, he liked it.

Shorty Graw's first six months in the Legion composed for him a gray, uneventful drill and labor filled period. In those months he learned to shoot a rifle, to carry a hundredweight pack for thirty miles a day without fainting, to drink like a Legionnaire, and to fight like one. The last two things came quite easily; his advance knowledge had been considerable.

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But at the end of that period Shorty's outfit went into action for the first time, and for the first time he personally came in contact with the colonel of his regiment. Both these things happened while the regiment, broken into *compagnies de marche*, was trekking up from Sidi-bel-Abbes to Camp Bedeau for the annual maneuvers and athletic competitions conducted on Camerone Day.

That was peaceful country between Bel-Abbes and Bedeau, peaceful with the exception of one Berber who had found a little too much liquid trouble in the form of native rum, and a rifle which would actually shoot. Some several kilometers outside of Camp Bedeau the rum-and-rifle-loaded native, Graw's company, and the colonel of the regiment all met. The native was in some scrub brush alongside the road. Graw and his company were upon the road, as was the colonel, seated in the rear of his staff car which crawled in low gear slowly past the silent, stiff companies of marching Legionnaires.

Seeing the colonel, the sheen of his *képi* gold braid and the medals on his chest, the native whooped and shot. He only shot twice, his first bullet missing the colonel by inches and smashing the adjustable windshield in front of that man, the second cleanly killing the colonel's chauffeur.

Then Shorty Graw, three other men of his squad, the *ajutant-chef* and two sergeants and a lieutenant were upon the native. Who really killed him was never fully determined. All of that group got credit, and out of it Shorty Graw got his new job as the colonel's chauffeur.

Standing there beside what was left of the native, the colonel studied Shorty Graw.

"So," he said in sharp and clear English, "we have the winner of the Monte Carlo Tirage with us?"

With his neck and head Shorty stiffly made a very short motion which might have been interpreted as a nod.

"Is it that I must tell another of you thick-heads that this is the Legion, and that a man's past is his own headache and not mine? I ask you a question; you do not answer me, your colonel. Needing a chauffeur and not liking this *sacré vache* sun, I ask it again! You are the man who won the last road race at Monte Carlo?"

Shorty's answer was a whisper, and was "Yes." The colonel turned then, mopping his square, blocklike face with a silk handkerchief, and bawling for the captain of the company. That man had once, years before, worked under the colonel. He moved very fast now. Without direct orders from the colonel he had the dead man lifted from the front seat of the car, had Shorty relieved of his pack and rifle, held open the rear door for the colonel, and smiled and saluted that officer as he told him he would send through the correct transferral papers when he reached Camp Bedeau.

"And now, you"—the colonel leaned forward and tapped Shorty on the shoulder—"I'm late, as it is. Let's see you drive!"

Shorty did not audibly answer; from a flat start he flung the big Delage into second gear and went roaring down the road past the companies, wreathing them in dust, exhaust smoke and oil fumes, for which they cursed him all of the rest of the way into Bedeau.

IN the next few weeks Shorty got to know his colonel very well. That man was without doubt the finest soldier Shorty had ever seen, and one of the best in the foreign regiments

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serving the tri-color of France. Behind him stretched thirty years of service in the Legion, through Madagascar, Indo-China, Syria, four years of the World War at the western front, and more than a score of "areas of danger" in Africa. The colonel wore practically every medal that a soldier serving France could possess and still live.

He openly boasted that he feared no man alive. That Shorty Graw did not doubt. But the colonel feared automobiles. And this last fact Shorty soon discovered.

He made his discovery three weeks after he had begun driving for the colonel. Bugles had wakened him in the middle of the night; staff officers and non-coms had pounded past his door, arousing first his anger and curses, then his curiosity. At last he rose, dressed by pulling on his pants, *képi* and boots, and went out.

The first battalion of the regiment, in which was included his old company, was forming up in the moonlit wastes of the drill field. They were dressed in service khaki. They were strangely silent and obedient for men who had been broken from well-earned sleep in the middle of the night. They carried full marching pack, and he could see one or two belated sergeants slipping rifle ammunition clips into their belt pouches.

Slowly, softly, Shorty swore. The battalion was going out. It was going into action. There was the colonel now, reading the outfit's orders while the adjutant held a flash light over the typewritten pages. The Baar-Ghazir tribe again, up in the High Atlas. That meant real action for the boys. And he, Shorty Graw, would have to stay here.

A bugle blew. The *commandant* of the battalion called an order that was as clear and sharp as a sword. In company fronts, then in squads and at last in column formation, the battalion wheeled and marched before the colonel. The drums of the *clique,* then the fifes, then the men of the ranks, took up the old, stirring and somehow savage marching song of the Legion, "La Saucisse."

In the pale silver wash of that moonlight Shorty Graw could see the faces of the rank and file. All of them, every man, was smiling.

"And me"—his voice was hoarse with emotion that surprised him—"me, I'll hang around back here, pushing old Hot Shot back and forth in his buggy!"

BUT Shorty was wrong. For eighteen hours later he and the colonel, in the big staff Delage, followed the route that battalion had taken. They went, for the most part, in low gear. Against their car came a steady stream of slow traffic, horse and camel litters, carrying the Legionnaires who had been killed or wounded in the first skirmish of what was now a full-sized battle.

Shorty stared at those wounded men; tried to talk with those who seemed as if they could hear, and talk back. But the colonel brusquely put an end to that; tapped him on the shoulder, reminded him that, as usual, he was late, and to drive this sacred cow of a car a bit faster.

Shorty made no answer; knowing that there was none that he could make. He hunched lower down in the seat, cursing bitterly and constantly under his breath, wheeling the Delage on along that winding, steep trail, contenting himself with one thing, the promise that there was a real battle up

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ahead, and when he got there he was going to see it at least, if not somehow join in it.

An hour or so later, at the end of a dark and short pass, the colonel ordered him to halt. Rapidly, Shorty pulled up his hand brake, cut his switch and jumped out, to hold open the door for the colonel. That man descended silently, sweeping back his heavy cape from his shoulders, bringing his gun more forward on his belt. Without a word he moved past Shorty and forward, into the darkness of the valley. Without a word, Shorty followed him, grinning at the flat and pulsant reiteration of machine guns, Lebels and mountain guns up ahead. Then the colonel stopped in his tracks and wheeled on him.

"Where," he asked in that voice which Shorty knew so well, "do you think you are going?"

"*Mais, mon colonel—*" he protested.

The colonel lifted his right hand and, with the index finger of it, pointed back to the car. "That's your detail, watching that car; to have it ready when I need it. Nothing else. *Est-ce compris?* Understand? Then, run!"

Shorty ran, for a few paces. Then stopped, to swear. He cursed the colonel, he cursed the Legion, he cursed Monte Carlo, Nice and the whole of France, to go on from there and unfavorably describe the day when he had first seen an automobile and even thought of driving one for pleasure.

It was a long job, and when he was through, most of his rage had left him. But some of it was still with him when he returned to the car, slid in under the driving wheel and put his head on his arms, trying to sleep in self-defense. Only once he raised it up from his arms. Then he spoke slowly aloud.

"So that's it, huh? All the time, I got to nurse this crate in back of the fun. Yeah. Yeah! Maybe you think, Hot Shot, that I joined this outfit just to wheel a gas-buggy around? Well, yes er no, Hot Shot... When you come outa this place, me takin' you, you'll want a new chauffeur. Boy, how you'll want a new chauffeur! And then, maybe, huh, little Shorty 'll see what he come to this outfit to see!"

With that, peacefully, Shorty put his head on his arms and slept.

THEY still talk about that ride in the Legion. Perhaps, when its memory is gone, they will still talk about the colonel and Shorty. But, for months, for years, afterward, it was one of the best and most famous barracks-room and wineshop stories in the Legion.

That ride began about two hours after dawn, a gray, cold and misty dawn in which the Baar-Ghazir, shouting, eager, mad, had charged right into the Legion machine guns, been hammered back and then all but exterminated by the Legion counter-attack. Standing beside a red-glowing Hotchkiss gun, the colonel had personally started and directed that counter-attack. It went perfectly; never again would the Baar-Ghazir bother the French. That tribe was through; next week, probably, headquarters would send outfits in here to build *postes;* consolidate the district and permanently take possession. All of which would do no harm to his own personal record and the record of the regiment.

The colonel was pleasantly smiling as he returned to the Delage.

"You," he said, brusquely, and tapped Shorty Graw upon the shoulder. "Wake up! I want to be in Marrakesh by eight o'clock, so that they'll hear

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about this at G. Q. G. at Rabat by nine. Fast, now!"

"Yes, sir," repeated Shorty softly, "'fast.'"

The colonel did not see Shorty's brief, wide smile as that man stirred the big motor into life, backed, cut and turned the car.

Under ordinary conditions, for the ordinary driver, the course down those steep and treacherous mountains into Marrakesh took four hours' driving. Under extraordinary conditions, those of a military nature, the drive had once or twice been made in three. Shorty Graw made it in just seven minutes over two.

How he did it, he himself later could not clearly remember. And how it was done, the colonel could never exactly say, for, after the first six or seven kilometers he, the colonel, was seated on the rear floorboards of the car, his *képi* jammed down over his brow, his eyes tightly shut and his hands more tightly clasped about the long robe rack handle on the back of the front seat.

The trail Shorty took had never been designed for automobiles and seldom used by them. In places, even the litter-camels had found trouble in getting by. But, argued Shorty, taking those same corners with a sheer cliff on one side and a sheer drop of hundreds of meters on the other, a camel couldn't go so fast. That kept you up; that kept you going, where a colonel could still get a little breath with which to make squawking noises that you could hardly hear.

He was a little over an hour on those mountain trails, Shorty. When he came out of them and hit the flat sand of the open *bled,* his brakes stank and cast off little black wisps of smoke, but his motor was cool and his gas tank was still more than half full. Marvelously straight, a thin white line before him, the caravan route stretched out of sight over the horizon to Marrakesh.

"O. K.!" whispered Shorty. "O. K.!"

Then he let the Delage full out.

The next time that car did less than forty-five miles an hour was when Shorty hit all four brakes to it, did a full racing turn and cut his switch before the amazed sentries and headquarters clerks standing outside the entrance of the *carré militaire* in Marrakesh. As he got out to open the door for the colonel, he looked back, the way he had come. No, that camel still lived. It might be a bit lame, and there might be a bit of paint off his front right fender, but, what the devil? Turning a bit, he looked down at the colonel.

HIS colonel still sat on the floor of the car. He was panting heavily.

Both his hands were lifted to break loose the grip of his *képi,* still jammed hard down over his ears. Somewhere during the journey, probably during one of those hairpin mountain turns, a heavy leather map case had been flung up by the motion of the car and struck him hard under the eye, which was now blue, and swollen. As Shorty silently and slowly opened the rear door and assisted the colonel to his feet, he saw that the stopper had been jerked loose from the colonel's *bidon,* and that more than a pint of extra-fine cognac now decorated the colonel's moleskin riding breeches. But he had time to notice no more; the colonel was talking to him, in a hoarse and uneven voice that was almost a croak.

"You, you—" The colonel had the *képi* free now; it had left a deep red

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ring about his bald head. "Crazy, are you? Out of your head? A dozen times, there . . ." His voice died out as he noticed the gawping group of sentries and clerks by the entrance gate. He stepped down from the car, he stood close to Shorty Graw, looking into Graw's eyes. And then, suddenly, the colonel laughed.

"No, I won't bust you, send you to the rock pile. I understand you. You're dissatisfied, fed up with this job, *n'est-ce pas?* You want to be back with a combat outfit, in the fighting, the action. So— And just for that, you'll stay here, doing this. I'm old-fashioned; I damn to Hades all automobiles, and give me a horse. But I'm just old-fashioned enough to keep you on as my driver, and wait for the chance when you do crack something up. Then—*pfut!*" The colonel smiled, and snapped to his full height. His voice rose, and had the crack of a lash. "Dismissed!"

CHAPTER III.

WILL AGAINST WILL.

FROM that day on it was a tacit and silent duel between the two, a duel which Shorty Graw was almost certain to lose. They told him so in the drivers' room at headquarters, and in the *postes* along the desert routes. Some of the drivers at headquarters, recognizing Shorty's type and knowing the colonel, even volunteered to swap places with him, effect a transfer. But Shorty Graw only smiled bleakly and shook his head at that.

"Naw," he told them quietly, "the old war horse wouldn't listen to it, any way it was put. Him, he lost three inches off his height an' ten years off his life, during that one. And I've give him a couple of honeys since. Medals, what the devil are they, when a guy's afraid of a crate like he is? I'll get him yet, I'll make him crack, or maybe he'll get me. Who cares, huh, after all?"

But, as they had told him there in the drivers' room at headquarters, it had to end some time. That end came about three months after the epic ride into Marrakesh. The colonel was on inspection, far south into the district his regiment held and he commanded. Alone except for Shorty Graw, he had toured the regimental *postes,* keeping steadily on toward the last and most southern, the recently captured and large caravan town of Abd-Mal-Mauk.

South from Abd-Mal-Mauk stretched the open, blazing *bled,* the real Sahara. The town was a key position in the control of the Sahara. Two weeks before, six sections of the Legion had stormed the place, taken it from its hereditary sheikh, put up the tri-color and barbed wire and some machine guns as the first signs of the "French peace."

From that town, the colonel had dreams of going on, to conquer the virgin territory which lay to the south, which had never been held by any white man in the history of the world. Those dreams ran bright and magnificent through the colonel's brain as he rode south with Shorty Graw toward Abd-Mal-Mauk. Shorty was driving fast, far faster than the colonel liked. But Shorty always drove fast; between them still that silent, relentless feud burned, and was never quiet.

Idly now, the colonel watched the head and shoulders of Graw, hunched before him in the driver's seat. The man could drive, all right. No ques-

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tion about that. There was no other chauffeur like him in the colonial forces of France. He was even famous; some of the younger staff officers in the other units had brought pressure upon him, the colonel, to have the man transferred to them for their use. The colonel smiled at that, remembering the tart, short words of his refusals. This man was his; between them there was a big debt yet to be settled.

The colonel's eyes rose from Shorty's khaki-clad back and took in the desert ahead. Squat against the horizon now he could see the dried mud walls of the town, the tapered bulb of the mosque minaret, and, very faint and small, the tri-colored flag of France. Leaning forward, he tapped Shorty Graw on the shoulder.

"Easy through the town, you! I want no coming back and looking up and down alleys for headquarters. I want to find that place right away."

IF the man at the wheel answered, the colonel did not hear him; there was only the great throbbing sound of the motor and the tires there. Donkeys, mules and dromedaries were on the sandy road now, coming in with loads of wood, fodder, food and water from the wells and small irrigated areas outside the town walls. In and around them Shorty hurtled the big Delage, motor still wide open, siren braying mournfully.

Twice, three times, sitting nervously on the edge of his seat, the colonel almost spoke out to tell him to go more slowly, but each time he just caught and held it back. Not until he saw the narrow, arched and traffic-filled gateway of the town did he speak, breaking his great promise to himself, which he had held ever since that day in Marrakesh.

"Easy, you! Slow! You'll never get through that gate alive! You—Ah!"

Shorty Graw had begun to brake. The Delage bucked, steadied, jumped again as the brake drums bit in, and then went on, at something very close to forty miles an hour. Almost miraculously, that gate had cleared. Where, a split second before, there had been a mass of bare-shanked, dirty Berbers, donkeys and overloaded women, there was now only one shaggy, dolorous-looking dromedary in charge of a naked and staring boy.

Dromedary and boy stood to the right side of the narrow arch. For the big car, they left inches of clearance space, and no more. Calmly, smoothly, Shorty shot the Delage at that space. And as he did so, for some reason he was never to find out, both boy and dromedary moved. In that moment, there was just one thing for Shorty Graw to do. He did it—he picked the dromedary, and missed the boy.

The Delage went right on through, and with it went the dromedary, one front hoof through the windshield. On the other side of the arch, against the wall of a native house, the Delage stopped, finishing the dromedary, and all but finishing the Delage. Slowly, Shorty lifted himself from under the dashboard, took his *képi* off from over his face, shook the broken glass away from his neck and back and looked over the back of the seat at where the colonel should have been.

The colonel was not there. He was, in fact, seated in the middle of the dusty but cobbled road. Low, slow and choked moaning noises came from the colonel. His hands were held over his face, and down from them blood trickled. Hearing Shorty's hoarse and incoherent mutter of inquiry, he lowered one hand to speak, and so allowed

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Shorty to see that the bridge of his nose had been quite severely flattened across his face by impact with the adjustable windshield in the rear of the car.

And then the colonel spoke, despite his unfortunate position and condition.

"You," he said hoarsely in the English he had learned thoroughly twenty years before, "when I get you, and I'm through, you'll look like one of your American picture puzzles, with half the pieces lost! You'll fry in hell but you'll fry in Biribi first, and— Call the guard! Call it quick! *'Cré nom d'un 'cré nom,* what I'll do to you!"

"Yes, sir," whispered Shorty; "yes, sir!" Then he turned and fled.

SHORTY GRAW knew nothing whatsoever of the old, dirty and evil town of Abd-Mal-Mauk. He just took the first turning and the first alley he came to, and continued on along it. It was a dark and narrow place, the buildings on each side leaning in so that they almost met above, thus forming a noisome sort of tunnel. Dogs, children, chickens and old men and women were in that place. He stumbled kicking and cursing past them, arousing a hurricane of curses in his wake. But just as he came to the end of that place, where it debouched into a wider and brighter alley, a voice called to him in coarse Legion French, and he slowed his pace.

A big and fat man stood in the dark depths of a doorway there. That man was clad in khaki, his collar tabs were the singular green of the Legion, the *képi* he held in one broad hand bore the exploding grenade device which definitely proved him a Legionnaire. In the other hand, he held a bottle of wine, which he companionably waved at Shorty Graw.

"Too hot to run, guy. Where you bound for? Why the rush?"

For just a minute, remembering the colonel and what lay behind him, Shorty studied the other, and then he advanced, and stood beside him, quickly told him. At that the fat man laughed, laughed until Shorty thought the whole street would hear, and the whole town of Abd-Mal-Mauk along with it. But at last the fat man raised and passed to him the wine bottle.

"Come in, come in! Graw, *n'est-ce pas?* The guy that made that trip from the High Atlas to Marrakesh. Come in!"

They went in then, to the cool and dark native wineshop. They sat and talked and drank. Mostly, they drank. The fat man, it seemed, was a comparative newcomer to Abd-Mal-Mauk and was not a member of the regular Legion *poste* garrison here. He and his *copain,* his buddy, compromised the members of a Renault armored car crew. They had been here in this hole of perdition for ten days now.

"A dirty, rotten hole," reiterated the fat man. "My buddy got the fever the day we hit the place from up north. And I got in the next day. Yes, a nice place. That wrecked what plans they had for us; they had enough sense to figure that you couldn't send two birds full of fever germs alone out into the desert, not with the kind of water they have around here. So to-morrow I'm going out north, and when my buddy's well, he hauls north, too. Luck, huh?"

Shorty Graw, working on a new bottle, halted for a space in which he admitted that as far as he saw it, it was luck. The fat Legionnaire shook his head at that.

"But you don't know just how much luck. Name of a cow, you don't! You know what they had whipped up for

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us? A two-man scouting patrol, a tour of over a thousand kilometers, out into the open *bled,* the Sahara. And they wanted to send the two of us, alone in an armored car, and not the dirty camel corps!"

"Huh?" said Shorty Graw, and gave the other a bottle. "Why did they want to throw that one at yuh? There ain't nothing out in there but sand and jackals, and a few Arabs who ain't no better than the jackals."

OVER the neck of the bottle the fat man grinned and winked at him.

"Ain't there, though? That's the big secret. You ever hear of the railway they want to run down, right smack into the heart of Afrique Centrale? Sure; every guy who's served out here knows about that. Well, they got their damn' railroad as far south as Marrakesh now, and they'll run it right on down through, you just wait and see. Then they'll tap the richest, biggest district in the world, and it 'll be *'la belle France'* for fair."

The fat man halted, to order another bottle of wine, of which he had drunk a good half before he continued:

"But what they didn't figure out until a year ago was how to get in there and make their surveys for the railroad, airplanes doin' 'em no real good. So they let this guy Citroen, who makes all those little French cars, like that American guy Ford, take a flyer at the country. It was good stuff for Citroen and his cars, and it was good stuff for the French government.

"Well, they ran two fleets of about eight cars each in, one down past here, the other farther east. Right down to the ivory country, and out again. Special cars, of course. Those boys dumped a lot of air-tight cans of gas, oil and water down in there, buried it under the sand." Caressingly the fat man addressed the bottle, passed the balance to Shorty Graw. "So the guys at headquarters study these Citroen party reports, and they study their maps, and they figure out that it is possible to send automobiles down in there. And they dope it out that, first, they had better send some other birds in to look over the rest of the country, check on the Citroen maps, and make a full military report, to say nothin' about them A-rabs. Look—"

From an inside pocket of his tunic the fat man drew forth a many-times folded and creased map. On it, very faintly penciled, were a series of small cross marks running almost down to Lake Tchad and the southernmost boundary of French Equatorial Africa.

"Them are the gas and oil caches the birds in the Citroen parties made. O. K. Well, look here. Here's Abd-Mal-Mauk, this bum town we're in now. There's no town, and no water, no wells, farther south for something like six hundred kilometers. Right down there—see?—six hundred kilometers from here, there's more wells, and a couple of big, rough A-rab tribes who have done nothin' but shoot at every French peace agent they ever saw. So it comes right down to this: the French ain't goin' to get any farther south, and they ain't goin' to get their railway, unless they can take care of them two tribes . . . Aw, heck! Talkin' makes me sober!"

Loudly the fat man called for another bottle, drank a fair half before he handed it over to Shorty Graw and went on:

"Those two tribes down in there, they control the desert, and they hate the French, but they hate each other,

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too. Hate each other like the devil; they're always fightin'. So headquarters figures it like this: send an armored Renault job down in there, using them gas and oil caches that's down in there now, look over the country and look over them two A-rab tribes, and see just where their villages and their wells are. Then—the rest is up to the Legion and the Camel Corps

"A dirty job it 'll be, too. For one tribe's run by an old guy named Sheikh Gifarg, and the other's run by an old buzzard named Sheikh Ilail-Aubn. All them two old guys and their tribes do and know is fight with each other, and a g a i n s t anybody else, meanin' the French in particular. And that's the nice little bit me and my buddy missed, just because we was lucky enough to catch a little fever . . . Le's have a drink!"

FOR a moment Shorty Graw regarded him in silence, feeling the raw, tart wine working within him, heating his pulses, heating his brain. He began to see some hope for a man stranded as he was, stranded hundreds of kilometers from nowhere, with a now murderously inclined colonel combing the town for him, no doubt. Shorty's slightly fuddled brain pictured the armored Renault as a chariot sent from heaven even though it would bear him only across an Arab-infested desert.

He demanded, "You and y o u r partner are pulling out without doing anything on the job?"

"You're just right."

"How about your bus, the car you brought in with you for the job?"

"Local *commandant de poste* ordered me to leave it here for the next unlucky pair of dogs they pick out to ride it down in there. They'll probably find a pair in a week or so—unless they decide to give us another shot at it. But why?"

Then Shorty Graw laughed and held out his hand.

"Give us that ignition key," he said, "and where is this tin-covered job? I ain't never seen that part of Africa."

"Zowie!" said the fat man. "We're saved! If you swipe that car, then I'll feel sure my buddy an' I won't get shot across the Sahara!" He was more than a bit drunk; he got to his feet and embraced Shorty Graw, throwing his arms around him. "Here—here!" He pressed the light steel key into Shorty's hands. "But wait until it's good and dark, and for another bottle, and until the patrol your colonel has sent out is through looking for you. It 'll never find you here, no. Not them guys; I know. And get good and drunk before you go, and take plenty; you'll need it."

The shiny little key in his stub, strong fingers, Shorty Graw studied the other man.

"But how about you, *copain?* This ain't going to put you in a box?"

"Me? No. I ain't supposed to have this key, anyhow; it's supposed to be in the sergeant-chief's desk, in the *poste*. I just picked it up, thinkin' I might want to take a little ride. And that map, it's only a copy I made from the original when I thought I was goin' south. Nobody has to worry about that car now but the sergeant-chief . . . Now come on—one more drink!"

They were both very drunk when Shorty Graw left at midnight. It was the fat man who insisted that he go alone.

"Heck, you can drive anything on four wheels, or on three. Don't need me around. I'm *en permission* right now, waitin' for the next convoy of

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supply trucks to come in and take me north; I can stay here in this dump all night if I want. You just keep straight on down this alley until you come to the place where they knocked all them buildin's down. Then you'll see the *poste,* and the crate. She's right there, alongside the barbed wire, full o' gas, and water, and oil... So long, soldier! And give my best to Capetown!"

CHAPTER IV.

ROARING WHEELS.

IT was, found Shorty Graw, just as the fat man had said. There were the houses, smashed flat to give the Legion machine gunners and riflemen a commanding sweep of the rest of the town. There was the barbed wire, and there was the camouflaged Renault armored car, just within the wire.

Squatted there in the shadows of the last half-demolished native house, Shorty took off one of his wrap puttees and with it made a bundle of the wine bottles he had bought, wrapping them in his tunic and then slipping it packwise on his back. He made no other preparation; he just went flat on his stomach and climbed forward, across the open space, and in, under the unelectrified barbed wire.

There were no lights in the whitewashed buildings of the *poste.* It was silent there. Clumsy-footed sentries pounded back and forth within the alignments of the wire, and that was all. Lying there, inside the wire and behind the bulk of the armored car, Shorty counted and timed the footsteps of the sentry who passed his way. Funny, he thought, how drunk a man could be, and still be sober.

The sentry clumped off toward the other end of his beat, humming softly a mournful tune in low German. Shorty Graw rose to his feet and ran, around the armored car and to the door on the other side. He was clumsy then, in his eagerness, and made quite a bit of noise getting it open. But then he was in the thing, and had slammed the door clanging shut, locked it, fumbled for and found the light switch.

Through the observation slits in the sides and turret above, he could hear loud shouts then, and an order or so, but he paid them no attention, very busy in starting his new prize on its way. Once again, he found that the fat man had been no liar; the ignition lock was just where he had said it would be, as were the gas, starter, spark and brakes.

There was some one hammering at the door now, and shouting in French. There was another man on the other side trying to mount up and thrust a Ruby pistol muzzle through one of the deflected observation slits. Shorty Graw laughed at that, primed his motor, kicked the starter. The motor caught, tremored, roared. His head back, his mouth open to let forth a loud, taunting and warning yowl, Shorty let off the brake, threw in the clutch and gears, and swung sharp left, right into the loose barb wire.

For a moment or so, it dragged and twanged along the solid rubber tires and hood, then it snapped and broke, and he was free, shifting from low into second, and then into high, his motor all but drowning out the hollow slam of the bullets against the steel side plates. He slowed down once, when he was free of the *poste* and out on the actual edge of the desert. He tuned the motor to a soft hum, rose, opened the door a crack and through it yelled, in English, and then in Legion French.

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"So long, gents! See you in jail!"

The knowledge was with him when he started the car forward once more that he was awfully tired, and equally drunk, now that the enforced moments of sobriety were behind him. But he laughed at that, reached for another bottle of wine, knocked the neck from it against a red-glowing exhaust pipe, and drove on.

A moon rose, green-gold and huge, soon after he started out across that desert. On that serried, limitless stretch of sand dunes, it set a pale and gorgeous light, making, for him, a sea of this place, the desert. That, coupled with the wine, his mad success and the moonlight, roused him to song. With the Renault throbbing along wide-open under him, he sang "Frankie and Johnny," "Working on the Railroad," and all of the old barroom and corner-minstrel songs of his youth back in Akron, Ohio. It was dry work; he had drunk again and again, hurling the empties out into the sand through the partly open door, at last knocking aside the regular ration supplies and water bottles of the fat man and his mate to search for more wine.

NONE was there. Up across the desert, as huge and as beautiful as the moon but far more terrible, a red, broad disk, the sun, was rising. It was no longer pleasant inside the car. It was hot. Steam rose from the hood of the car; hot oil fumes drifted back to him. He stopped, and tried in vain to study the exquisite and extremely valuable little American gyroscopic compass fixed behind him in the van of the car.

But the needle of it danced before his eyes, blurring with the compass card marks, and the marks on the map the fat man had given him.

"No sense goin' on," he muttered to himself. "Might's well park here. Go on, when I get me some shut-eye, an' a bit o' food."

Suddenly, as if in answer to his words, the smooth sound of the motor became a choked sputter, then died completely. Looking down at his gas gauge on the dash, he saw the tank was empty, and the spare, carefully insulated tanks behind him would have to be connected up before he went on.

"O. K. Suits me, huh, baby?" He cut the ignition switch, and with what he dully thought was extreme carefulness, shut and strongly locked the door, slid all the protective shutters into place, even in the gun turret above. There, with the same idea behind his actions, he ran a belt into the big, dull-shining Hotchkiss gun and left it wholly ready for action. Beside the gunner's bucket seat there he also found an issue revolver, loaded and holstered to the side-wall of the car. This he took down and thrust into a trouser pocket before descending to the greater room and comfort of the van of the car.

Then, as he had done so many times before in his life, he stretched his arms on the steering wheel, placed his head upon them, and quite peacefully slept.

REPEATED and almost regular clanging noises and the sounds of voices that spoke a tongue he had never before heard, awoke him. That did not bother him at first; his initial thought was that he was in some sort of extremely bad and hot Turkish bath, and that somewhere, during the past night, he had been struck over the head with some quite heavy and quite hard object. Then it all came back to him as he saw the fat man's map in the little bracket beside him for

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that purpose, and he laughed until his head hurt again, and he cursed, and stopped.

Blunderingly, stumbling and cursing, he reached up for one of the insulated water bottles in the rack in the rear of the van. The sounds he made in doing so must have been heard by the men outside, for as he drank, he heard them talking among themselves in loud, excited voices and several bullets were fired clanging at close range against the side-plates, to go whining off in ricochet into the desert.

"Ah, what th' devil?" he muttered, slapping in the stopper of the big *bidon* with the heel of his palm. "Cut it out; one o' you might get hurt, and then blame me or old Hot Shot."

He crawled up then into the turret, his revolver in one hand, and very cautiously pulled back one of the steel covering slits just a very little bit. Close beside the car, right in against its almost red-hot sides, were gathered perhaps twenty booted, b e a r d e d and spurred Arabs. They were thin-faced, keen and fine-looking men, and one of them, who wore a b e a u t i f u l silk *djellaba* of solid crimson, bore the green turban of the Meccan pilgrim.

"Uh, huh!" whispered Shorty Graw, staring down. "That must be old Sheikh Gifarg, one o' the two guys that my fat drinking companion spoke of, back in Abd-Mal-Mauk. And when the sheikh finds out, it'll tickle him to beat the devil, because he's got all his boys and himself so close in alongside that I couldn't hit 'em with a spare spark plug, or the Hotchkiss there, or this gat, even. These damn' peepholes won't let me." He was silent for a moment, thinking of something else, and then he laughed.

"Course they ain't going to do me no harm. But they ain't going to do me no good, either. I got to get out to connect up them fuel lines, and to put more water and oil into the crate. And when I do, old Sheikh Whatever's-your-name is going to catch me off third with the bases full. Ain't that funny!"

MOST of the morning he sat there, pondering just that. There was no solution to it. They had him, and, equally, he had them. When he opened that door and attempted to get out, no matter under what conditions, he would instantly be shot dead. And when they, for any reason, broke more than five feet away from the sides of the car, he could deflect first his pistol, then the Hotchkiss gun, and do considerable immediate damage.

And around noon, his clothes sopped through with sweat, half of them discarded, he summoned all his logic and his few terms of Berber and carefully approached a loophole, slid the shutter over just a very little bit and haltingly made known his ideas on the subject. His immediate answer was a rifle shot right at the loophole, and the right end of the loophole, which sprayed him, ducking back, with a sting of powdered lead.

"All right!" he called forth in his most indignant Berber. "You birds wait and see!"

He delayed there for no further answer, slammed to the shutter and climbed up into the gunner's seat above, set the piece for instant fire. Near four o'clock in the afternoon, when the armored car broiled like an iron oven cast adrift in the burning sea of the desert, one of the young warriors, thirsty since morning and a bit dazed now from sunstroke, broke from the small strip of shade beside the car and raced for the nearest sand dune.

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Shorty Graw had quite a lot of fun with that man. He sprayed machine gun lead ahead of him, behind him and on both sides of him. And as he topped the ridge and was within yards of safety, he let him have it, drilled him through and through. From below, where the rest of the warriors lay, he could hear rumbled comments and curses.

"O. K.," he whispered; "now you're gettin' sensible."

He dropped down as he whispered that, to the floor of the van, and crossed over to an observation slit.

"Sheikh Gifarg," he whispered through it; "Sheikh Gifarg!"

"And what does the unclean *roumi* dog want now?" asked a voice in startlingly passable French.

"Is it that the sheikh is not content," continued Shorty in French, "that he and all his men will be killed off as soon as they go more than two steps from the side of this fort?"

"No." There was a sort of half chuckle behind that word. "For I, Gifarg, and my warriors know that the *roumi* jackal cannot move his fort without coming forth from it, else he would have moved it long ago. Also, he may kill all of us now here, one by one, but there are hundreds of our tribesmen in the dunes there, masked from your fire, and they would kill you now, or seven days from now, when you, too, are forced to come forth."

"Huh!" Slowly, Shorty closed the shutter, and returned to the gunner's seat in the turret to think. "Maybe," he said softly, "maybe that guy ain't right, though! But even then—" He looked down at the revolver in his hand; he crouched, so that he could see out of one of the narrow slits. Darkness was spreading there on the desert. It would soon be night, and there would be a great chance that his one threat would be no good—that this bearded old duck and his warriors could get off and back into the dunes, alive.

"You're sober now, you lunk," said Shorty Graw slowly, aloud. "Pushing the button and pushing the rum has got you so far, and no more. And now you're through. Boy, this'll sure make a swell coffin! Yeah, and you even walked out on old Hot Shot. Left him there, knocked for a goal and with a broken nose, for a lotta natives to stare at. A fine guy you didn't turn out to be!"

SLOWLY, quite slowly, Shorty Graw got to his feet and then slid down into the van of the car, to go to the same slit where he had stood before. Through it, he once more called out to the old sheikh there.

"I want to talk to you."

"I, Gifarg?"

"So."

"How?"

"Here, inside. And just to make sure I'm not lying, let the rest o' your men start back now. Let them go one by one; the second one not starting until the first one's safe. How about it?"

"I will see."

"See quick, then!"

Outside that slit, he could hear old Gifarg's deep, clear voice and the more excited, shrill voices of his warriors. But then, suddenly, one, an old and lame man with a long muzzle-loading *moukhala* slung over his shoulders, stepped out from the patch of shadow flung by the Renault and went on, straight but without haste, across the desert flatness and to the dunes. Another and another followed him.

Something heavy and metal, the butt

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plate of a gun, hammered on the door of the car.

"Open," said Sheikh Gifarg, "and let me in!"

In that dark and confined place, those two men sat and talked. Shorty Graw at last summed it all up.

"I'm a deserter. I beat it, *en promenade*. If they ever catch me, I'm through. All I wanta do is live, get me? Live. I got nothin' against you or yours, or any other guys out here. I just want—"

"Be still!" said the old and straight man across from him suddenly. "Be still, *roumi*, and listen to me. You have just admitted defeat; admitted that you are through, are trapped. And that, it is true; for even if you killed me here, now, it would be just the same for you. The rest of my tribe would stake out your half-dead body on some ant-hill. But, listen to me. . . ."

Easily, the old Berber leaned closer to Shorty Graw; he placed a strong, long hand on that man's knee.

"There is south of here another tribe, who control the two oases toward the far desert. For centuries, as far back as our tribal history goes, our men have battled those men. They are our blood enemies, and their sheikh, Ilail-Aubn, I have sworn to kill with my own hands. But that, for us, is hard to do. They are a strong tribe, they have more guns, more warriors and camels than ourselves; their village is on higher, better protected ground—"

"And so?" There was a nervous, husky tremor in Shorty Graw's voice.

"If you will fight with me and my tribe, against the Ilaili, you will go as you came, safe and alone."

"Yeah!" Shorty Graw's laugh was a rasping sound. "And how much good is your word?"

"This good—that I will stay here with you in this fort-that-moves until that battle is over and you are free to go wherever you wish to go."

For a time, then, Shorty Graw did not answer; he sat staring at the other man in silence, a weird and confused train of thoughts flashing through his brain. But finally he agreed.

"All right. *Ça va*. But you'd have to stick along with me in this can anyhow; it takes two men in battle: one to run it, one to handle the machine gun. Come up, and I'll show you how she goes. But, first, give me yer hand on that, sheikh, old sock!"

CHAPTER V.

CHARGE!

AN hour later, strangely content and without emotion, Shorty Graw sat before the black, peaked tent of Sheikh Gifarg and watched a slow procession of camels climb the slope leading to the tent village of the tribe. Old Gifarg himself led that procession, and in his hand he held the oil-stained map Shorty Graw had given him an hour ago, the map which Graw in his turn had received from the fat and drunken man in Abd-Mal-Mauk. And on those swaying, neighing camels now, lashed cleverly in place, were a dozen hermetically sealed cases of gasoline and oil, taken from the nearest cache made by the Citroen party a year before.

Shorty smiled and rose. "I wish, fat guy," he whispered, going toward old Gifarg and the kneeling camels, "that you was here, because this is sure going to be a battle as soon as I pour in that oil and gas. What comes after that, I dunno, or care one heck of a lot. We'll find out then, anyhow."

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Six hours later, at dawn, Shorty Graw had his battle. Afterward, every detail, every shot and yell of it, was to remain clear and undimmed in his brain. It began swiftly, savagely, and it ended the same way. Throughout those night hours, between the time that Shorty got his precious gasoline and oil, up until the first ruddy flush of the dawn, old Gifarg craftily encompassed the village of the Ilaili with his camelmen.

Then, standing at the open door of the Renault, Shorty crouched nervously at the wheel within, the old Berber made a shrill whistling sound with his two forefingers. At that sound a score of his warriors, spread out on the lip of the hill flanking the tent village above, fired, yelled, ran forward, went flat, and fired again.

In that village dogs yapped, men cursed, and women screamed. Then those sounds were wiped out by another burst from those eager riflemen, crawling closer now, firing faster. There was a great, wild grin on Gifarg's face as he turned and climbed up into the armored car.

"Now," he whispered, "in a moment, *roumi*, it will be our time. They will rush out of the village, those Ilaili, and make a break for the open desert. And then my camelmen will fall upon them, beat them back, back here. And then we, in our turn, will fall upon them, you and I, and I will let them taste of that sweet, swift-talking little gun up above. *Aiecah! Inch'Allah!* I and mine have waited long for this day! Now go—go!"

"Yes, sir, guy!" said Shorty huskily, slamming shut the door, flinging in his gears. "You can't hold me back!"

It was, they found, very much as Gifarg had said. The Ilaili, fleeing from that shrewd fire of the score or so of riflemen, had rushed off into the open desert. And there Gifarg's camelmen had smashed upon them with the lance, the sword, the rifle. Once more, back into the village the Ilaili had retreated, not broken yet, still savage, still fighting bitterly and well against these men who had never in centuries defeated them.

But then Shorty Graw and the Renault were upon them. Never had the Ilaili seen anything like it, and against it they could do n o t h i n g. Through their ranks, through their tents and mad c a m e l lines Shorty Graw turned and smashed time, time again, the Hotchkiss l e a p i n g and flaming in the hands of old Gifarg in the turret above.

FINALLY the Ilaili broke and ran off into the desert. Those of them who were left died there, at the hands and weapons of Gifarg's tribesmen. Sitting there in the midst of that smashed village, motor and machine gun silent, Graw and the old sheikh heard and could visualize all that.

"It is done," said Gifarg. He had come down from the turret and stood now at the door of the car, peering out through one of the slits.

"No," said Shorty Graw, sitting there at the wheel; "it's just begun."

Gifarg turned swiftly at those soft words. But not swiftly enough. His big, old-fashioned pistol was in his hand, yes, but the small, red-eyed *roumi* held a gun in his hand, too, and that gun was trained full on his, Sheikh Gifarg's, lean stomach.

"Now," said Shorty Graw, and grinned, "you listen to me, mister. My life ain't worth anything. Yours, though, it's worth a lot, about double what it was an hour ago. *N'est-ce*

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pas? Maybe you'll plug me with that cannon o' yours, but I'll sure plug you plenty back. Except fer one thing."

He paused; he waited for old Gifarg to speak, and when that man did not, went on again.

"You guys have been fighting out here for centuries like this. One tribe against the other, never two tribes together. And every year you've lost more in taxes, in flocks stole and good young warriors killed than you'd lose in ten years paying taxes to the French."

"You mean—" said Gifarg, his voice just above a whisper.

"I mean," said Shorty Graw, "what you think. I just had a big and sudden change of mind. I've had my fun, I've had my battle, and now I'm going back. I want my old job again. And if you're wise, if you want to live, you're going with me, to tell 'em you're a good, smart boy and know just how much harm a fort-that-moves can do. Right?"

For a long time then, inside that dark and oil-reeking car, there was a silence. It was broken by Sheikh Gifarg.

"Yes," he agreed quietly.

"Tell 'em, then," said Shorty Graw quietly, "and tell 'em quick!"

IT was noon, and the colonel was seated at the head of the officers' mess in the Legion *poste* in Abd-Mal-Mauk. Flies buzzed lazily about the table and the eaters. In a corner, stiff and statue-like, the German mess orderly stood without motion, the sun shining on his pink, closely shaven skull. The only sounds there were those of the flies, and of knives, forks and glasses. For days the colonel had been silent; and respecting him, the younger men had been wordless also.

Suddenly, though, the colonel raised his head and dropped his fork. He came to his feet, ran to the narrow window, and stared through it at the white desert beyond. He swore then, as no man there had ever heard him swear before, and wheeled around, facing the room and the staring knot of officers there.

"He's back!" he husked at them thickly. "He has brought it back!"

All of them could hear and see it then, for, smashing at full speed, steam and oil smoke rising from its hood, it was raking through the barbed wire barriers before the *poste*.

"Down!" yelled the colonel. His eyes still on that dusty, bullet-pocked Renault, he reached out a hand behind him, whispering, "Give me a gun, damn you! Give me a gun!"

But, oddly, when they were all armed and positioned, the colonel gave them no command to shoot; just kept his eyes fixed on that bucketing armored car.

It was close to the *poste* building now, rushing right up against it, up against the window where they crouched. There, feet from it, with a screaming of brakes and rubber, it slashed to a sliding stop and the roar of the motor choked out. Thinly, hardly audible, a voice came to them from inside the car.

"Hey, you guys inside! The colonel there? The colonel?"

"You!" said the colonel, recognizing that voice and forgetting everything else. "Wait until I get my hands on you!"

"Now, listen, colonel, listen!" pleaded Shorty Graw. "I got a friend o' yours here, or at least a guy who wants to be a friend o' yours. An old bird, a guy named Sheikh Gifarg. Him and me is buddies; we just won a bat-

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tle together, out there in the *bled*. I just give him a lotta sales talk on the Legion and armored cars, and he's all set to sign up with you and the rest of the boys. You better let him come out; it's getting damn' hot in here again, and he might melt away before you could get him to sign . . . Now, no potting at him, colonel; he's a buddy o' mine, and—and you know me!"

FOR several minutes the colonel was totally devoid of the powers of coherent speech. It was the senior officer of the *poste* who ordered the aligned and fully armed platoons back from around the car, and then told Shorty Graw to open the door and let Gifarg forth.

Quite swiftly and easily it was done, and old Gifarg, black with oil fumes from the motor, his clothing stuck to his sweaty body, staggered forth into the arms of the senior officer of the *poste*. Standing there, the senior officer stared within at Shorty Graw.

"You," he said, trying his best to keep his voice level, "had better come, too. The colonel will want to talk to you, later."

Inside the mess room, the doors and windows shut and locked, the company sent back to its r e g u l a r duties, the colonel regained his powers and spoke. He talked first with Sheikh Gifarg, and then with the senior officers.

Lastly, the colonel spoke with Shorty Graw.

"What," he asked, his voice still quite hoarse, "can I do for you, seeing that you have taken the—road back?"

"Why"—Shorty Graw cleared his throat, shuffled his feet—"if the colonel would permit it, I'd like my old job as driver for the colonel again."

The colonel was perhaps one of the finest soldiers serving in the foreign regiments of France; he possessed practically every m e d a l given for bravery that a man could gain, and still live. His answer was immediate and affirmative. But as he heard that answer, Shorty Graw could not hold back a quick smile. For as the colonel said that one word, Shorty Graw noticed that the colonel's fingers were tightly crossed.

THE END.

The Floating Gardens of Kashmir

POOR farmers residing in the vicinity of Dal Lake in Kashmir use a novel system of raising crops without having to face the problem of paying rent. Using long handled tongs and working from a boat they drag mud from the bottom of the lake. This they bring ashore and mix with rafts of loosely woven withes. When the mud dries the rafts are eased into the water. Melons, cucumbers and other vegetables are planted and the raft is allowed to drift, the roots of the vegetables drawing water from beneath.

When the crops are ripe, the farmer hooks his garden to a canoe and paddles away to market. And then the customer may be assured of fresh vegetables, for he may indicate those he wishes plucked. There are many house boat dwellers on Dal Lake, and these frequently complain after storms because a floating garden has collided with their residences.

C. A. Freeman.

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Straight into the black pit Ford dropped

Red Twilight

Neither the pleas of fellow humans nor the stealthy, treacherous attacks of half-human monsters shook the determination of Paul, ruler of Mars, to steal Earth's water

By HARL VINCENT

Author of "Beyond the Dark Nebula," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

FORD MATTHEWS was sitting in the office of his export business near Wall Street one June morning, wishing he could get away from the irksome grind. Suddenly the shrieks of his secretary called attention to a red film which was tinting the sun. Crowds were soon milling in the streets, as the sun sank in a terrifying red haze. Screams, shouts, moans rang up from the mob, where frightened humans crushed together in a panic.

Ford called a scientific friend on the

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visiphone; and was urgently summoned to the scientist's laboratory. While on his way there, he saw that the government's proclamations had calmed the people with a story that the red fog was a passing cosmic cloud.

Arriving at the workshop of Owen Wardell, a brilliant physicist outlawed for his advanced ideas, Ford found to his amazement that Wardell's anti-gravity space ship was completed. True, he had been working on the vehicle for years, but the difficulties were endless. Money for all the experiments had been supplied by Ford, who believed in the project and hoped above hope to reach Mars and find his brother Paul, who had set out for that planet with twenty others in a big rocket ship a score of years before.

Owen Wardell scoffed at the proclamations from Washington, and said that the red light was the result of a ray from Mars—a warlike move of Martians. It was not harmless—for the Earth's supply of water was rapidly disappearing!

Washington would not believe Wardell's explanation, however. Only one solution offered hope. Owen and Ford must set out for Mars.

The space ship proved a great success. Reaching Mars, they were guided by Neet, a friendly little Martian, to the palace of the ruler, Bahspahl. "Boss Paul" was a giant, a human, a great bearded Viking of a man, who confirmed their guess that he was Ford's brother, Paul Matthews, but flatly refused to shut off the deadly red rays. Mars needed the water. The giant Paul did not seem to have the human sympathy which Ford had anticipated.

Paul's bodyguard consisted of two steel robots, grim and evil-looking monsters with arms like massive steel cables. While Ford was alone with them, one suddenly seized him and hurled him into a black pit which had opened in the floor.

CHAPTER VI.

SECRET FORCES.

DOWN a long corridor floored with black marble the mighty Paul led Owen Wardell. It did not occur to Owen that they were leaving Ford in danger, even though the two robots were standing in the big room. The scientist was still wondering why Paul was so cold toward his brother.

"It surprises you," Owen asked, "to see Ford here?"

The big man strode on silently at his side, still unwilling to tell what seemed to be on his mind. He had been deeply affected, yet he had acted oddly for one so long gone from his own land. He had asked no word about his father.

"Surprises me, yes," he returned, without enthusiasm. "But I would not have known him. He was quite a youngster then; now he is a full-grown man."

Owen tried another question.

"The arrival of our space ship in the square before your residence was a surprise, of course?"

"Yes, although we always thought one might reach here some day." The Boss raised his eyes.

There was something of suspicion, almost of alarm in the quick look he gave Owen. All was not well in Square House.

"Where are the others?" Wardell asked, thinking of the "we" in the man's hesitant reply to his last question. "Those who came over in the

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rocket? There were about twenty, I believe."

A sudden look of ferocity came from under the bushy blond brows.

"Must I give you an account of the past twenty years? I who am master here?"

Owen threw caution to the winds in a flare-up of fury.

"What's the matter with you?" he demanded. "You're an Earthman and should have some sort of feeling for mankind. Instead, you don't give a damn; you met us with open antagonism; your own blood brother means nothing to you, it seems. What the devil *is* wrong here?"

"You talk to me this way?" The giant's face was gray with anger.

"I do. I'll talk even if you break my neck with those big hands of yours." The lean, bent body of the scientist straightened determinedly.

They had entered the ornamental cage of a lift and the other had placed a hand on the starting lever. He removed it now and the thick fingers twitched. Owen caressed the butt of his automatic where it lay in his pocket. Then the Viking guffawed.

"Forget it!" he laughed. "I suppose I have become peculiar in these twenty years, from your point of view. What of it? I remember your name, Wardell; you were a scrapper in those days. Had the engineering societies in an uproar most of the time."

Owen flushed, but he was relieved. Perhaps, after all, Ford would be able to win over this queer, changeable brother of his. They would have to handle him with care, however.

"Sorry I was hot-headed," said Owen crisply.

"Never mind. We're to have some long talks together, Wardell, about my companions in the rocket ship—" He hesitated and his lashes flickered strangely. "They have all died," he said brusquely, avoiding Owen's eyes, "except Carlotta, my wife. She was the widow of Charles Best. And her daughter Nina, Best's daughter, born the first year we were here. That is all—three of us."

"It can't be—"

"Yes, let me tell you!" Paul's tongue loosened and the swift words came. "The rocket ship accounted for eight. There was an accident soon after we left Earth. One of the stern tubes blew out, throwing us violently from our course. The shock killed them. Art Carey—you knew him. Davis, Trent, Tom and Mary Baxter—Fields—"

A shot rang out, echoing in the corridor along which they had come. Owen yelled; there was no mistaking the roar of that .38 Colt.

"Ford!" he shouted, leaping through the door of the lift. "It's him, Paul—his gun!"

In a single bound the Boss had passed him and was running with great strides toward the room they had left. His furious bellows echoed awesomely in the long, empty hall.

OUT of breath from his exertions, Owen stumbled into the room not ten steps behind the big man of Square House. Paul Matthews was standing, petrified, before the still form of one of the robots close to the table. The irregular trap-door had closed again, and no line showed where it had opened.

Ford was not there.

"Where is he?" Owen demanded of Paul.

Paul turned on him fiercely. "Don't ask me!" he roared. "Look! Do you realize what's happened?"

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His finger pointed to the headpiece of the robot. Owen saw a ragged opening where one eye had been. Paul's finger was trembling—with rage, or excitement. He seemed to be amazed at the turn of events, though he might have been acting.

"Ford's bullet!" Owen cried. "The damn' thing was after him." He turned fiercely on Paul. "What are these machine-men, anyhow? Who owns them? Who controls them—and what are they trying to do to us?"

The big man's face went rigid, and his lips met in a straight line. He would not answer.

Owen's eyes again took in every part of the big room. Ford had vanished as if by black magic. The scientist closed his fingers on the butt of his pistol; had Paul covered.

"Find your brother at once," he threatened, "or I'll kill you."

The giant laughed harshly, a sinister rumble.

"Put away that gun, you fool, if you want to see Ford alive. You could never get him back. Maybe I can. There are dark forces on this planet—things you never dreamed of on Earth."

The bearded giant was across to the table in a bound, glaring at a small black cube. Talking. Owen hesitated, his finger trembling on the trigger of the automatic. Paul waved him away, scowling and shaking his head. He returned the pistol to his pocket, suddenly ashamed. Paul was not the cause of his brother's disappearance. He seemed as astounded as Owen.

"Carlotta!" Paul was saying. "You are in your room? Good, I must see you at once." He left off the use of English and spoke rapidly a few harsh words in the outlandish tongue of the Martians.

"Stay here," he said to Owen, "and keep out of this. It's for your own good and Ford's."

Then he was out of the room, and Owen heard his ponderous running footsteps in the hall, dying away. A moment later Owen was after him; saw him turn a corner and vanish in a side passage.

Silent as a tomb the gloomy halls of Square House were now. With his heart pounding, with eyes and ears alert, and with the automatic pistol gripped in tense fingers, Owen went in the direction Paul had taken.

At the end of the small side passage was a metal door. There was no knob or latch. He pushed his shoulder against it. Slowly it yielded, and Owen thrust his pistol forward as he peered through the crack. A small room was beyond, empty.

When he entered he thought he heard voices behind a second door which opened from the tiny cubicle. Martian voices! Shrill and unintelligible. They were approaching.

He drew back into a corner as the second door swung open. Two of the gnome-folk came in, jabbering excitedly in their own tongue. They were attired in tight silken shirts and knee-length breeches of shiny stuff like patent leather, as Bahspahl had been. But the costume had lent the air of a swaggering buccaneer to the big American. It served only to make the small Martians ridiculous. Their bloated chests, large ears and spindly limbs made them seem like grotesque, dressed-up marionettes.

They passed through the cubicle without seeing Owen. Beyond the second door another hall extended. Like the rest of the mansion, it was lighted with a soft golden glow from walls and ceiling. At the end of this hall

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Owen came to a narrow, unlighted passage. He stopped, listening; he thought he heard a voice, harsh and masculine. Then followed hollow, complete silence.

Something clanked there in the darkness, and Owen's heart stood still. A light flashed on, and he saw one of the robots standing at an open door. He had heard a voice; it came through clear and distinct now. Paul's!

The robot's eye-lenses were turned away, so that whoever was at the controls could not see him. The voices came from a door but a few feet away. The robot stood further along the hall. Owen decided to risk being seen by the lenses, and slipped on tiptoes to the door through which the voice was coming.

He saw the robot step back ponderously through another door. The light in the narrow passage flashed off. In a room of luxurious hangings and heavy with the odor of incense a man and a woman were talking. Paul and Carlotta. Owen slid in through the door, which was ajar, and secreted himself behind a painted screen that stood there. He could see them through a narrow slot that divided the screen vertically.

She was a magnificent specimen, this Carlotta. Almost an Oriental. As dark as Paul was light, she was an alluring exotic beauty. Reclining on a low, cushioned affair like a *chaise longue*, her superb figure was covered only by the flimsiest of material. Long black lashes lay on her smooth creamy cheeks. Scarlet lips were drawn in a tight line as Paul talked.

Her eyes startled Owen when she raised the long lashes. Mysterious fires burned in those intense orbs. Their color was indeterminable, but he knew they were dark. Hypnotic; insistent. A man like Paul Matthews would do much for such a woman.

"PAUL," she was saying, and her voice was like a purring kitten's, "what's this man like—this one who claims to be Ford?"

"A handsome devil, and well set up. Just the sort I would expect him to be. Fearless, too. I hope they didn't get him; those devils down there."

So Paul Matthews did have human feelings. Owen pricked up his ears.

"Don't worry," the woman said. "They'll be in time, Misor and Zan. We'll know in a few minutes."

"Ought to go below myself," Paul said gloomily.

"No, no—Paul!" The woman sat erect, her face draining of color. "Tell me you'll never go down! For Carlotta—please!"

There was stark terror in her voice. A deep mystery was here. Owen felt again the power of mysterious forces that lay beneath the calm exterior of Square House. Something deep and terrible—so terrible that it could not even be mentioned.

"You win; you always do." Paul raised his great bulk wearily, then paced the floor like a caged beast. The woman's eyes followed him warily.

Owen was puzzled. One minute it seemed that those astounding orbs were adoring the big man who paced there; worshiping him beyond the ken of any mortal. The next instant they were hating, with bestial fury!

A voice whispered from one of those black cubes on a taboret close by the screen. Owen shrank back. Paul was electrified. He touched a switch, and the voice spoke up louder in the shrill sibilants of a Martian.

Paul replied swiftly and in furious tones, using that gibberish of the

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dwarf-folk. Owen could have cried out in his uncertainty. This was torture.

"There are the radium pits yet," Paul was saying, "and the branch aqueducts. Find him!" The big fellow dropped into his chair once more and sat with head bowed in his hands.

"Of course they'll find him." The woman's voice was soothing.

Yet Owen experienced a chill of sudden foreboding. This woman was a dual personality. She could be a vicious Jezebel in one rôle, a saint in the other. And Owen was convinced by what he saw in the swift cruelty of that beautiful face that she knew what had happened to Ford—had a hand in it herself.

Click! A rope of cold steel twined around Owen's neck, choking him. Bodily he was lifted from where he crouched and swung high in the air; shaken crazily by that chill thing which gripped him.

His vocal cords paralyzed by the pressure, he could not cry out. His eyes saw only a bloody haze. Like the red twilight, it was. Drifting, swaying, his senses reeling— Something broke then in his mind—sounded like a pistol shot—

He knew no more.

CHAPTER VII.

CAVERNS OF TERROR.

FORD MATTHEWS heard the trap-door shut with a thud as he dropped swiftly into the blackness. He struggled to right himself, that he might land on his feet. If the pit ended in a solid bottom, he might manage to escape with no more than a broken leg. If there was water, his body would cleave it.

Down he sped in the foul inkiness. His mind, he knew, was working with extreme rapidity. There was water down there—he smelled it.

He struck its rankly odorous surface with a splash that echoed deafeningly in his ears. His body drove into its depths swiftly and cleanly. Down he went like a plummet. It was bitter cold and bitter to the nostrils, that foul liquid into which he had been flung. Water? This was sewage, more likely.

Powerfully he struck out, and it seemed he would never reach the surface. His lungs were bursting, and little light-flecks danced before his open eyes. There was nothing to be seen in the swirling darkness, but these flickerings told him he could not hold his breath an instant longer.

And then, when he was at the limit of endurance, he thrashed out on top. Drawing the vile air into his lungs in convulsive sobbing gulps. Drifting in the sluggish, sucking current.

Whoever it was that operated the radio control of the robot, had seen to it that the metal monster made a thorough job of it. This place was a horrible death chamber. Dark as a pocket and reeking of poisonous corruption. Ford swam slowly and with frequent rests, floating to conserve his strength.

Endless time passed, dragging. His stroke was feeble now; muscles refused his bidding. Then his hand encountered a rock wall. Stiff fingers closed on a projecting stone and he clung to it, panting.

Off there in the darkness was a faint green light. Shivering, he regarded it. He knew he could never span that distance swimming. Then too, it looked more like a patch of phosphorescence than daylight or any ordi-

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nary artificial light. He was done for, unless he could get solid ground under his feet; his teeth chattered with the cold, and he was dizzy with weakness.

An eerie scream rang through the cavern, clamoring wildly from unknown depths and reverberating in the unseen vastness of the place. A crackling flash then, like the lightning of Earth, illuminated huge stalactites, icicle-like, high overhead. In that brief instant he also saw a narrow ledge along the rocky wall.

He reached out weakly. With his last ounce of energy he pulled himself up and lay there gasping.

SLOWLY Ford's strength returned. In a languid half-stupor he lay hardly caring whether he lived or died. Thinking. Trying to figure things out. Some awful menace hung over Square House; he had sensed it in his brother's manner. Something they feared up there; a power they could not fully comprehend or overcome. It couldn't be the gnome-folk. They were harmless enough—friendly. What then? Evil minds were at work somewhere about the place. Devilish hands had operated the robot control.

Strange rustlings and whisperings came from out the darkness and Ford staggered to his feet. Straining his eyes in the Stygian gloom, he heard them again; faint whistling twitters. A cold chill chased down his spine. He felt his way along the ledge, advancing toward the distant green luminescence.

His heart did a flip-flop at sound of a soft voice close at hand. A girl's voice, throaty and mellow. Halting abruptly, he stood there in the blackness, waiting. Holding his breath.

"Earthman!" the voice called softly. "Are you there?"

"Yes. Who are you, and where?"

"I am Nina—a friend. Stay where you are, Earthman. I will come to you."

Who was this woman whose soft footsteps padded over the stones, drawing near? If a Martian, she had learned English perfectly. It was not with the broken, halting speech of Neet she spoke, but with carefully modulated, cultured accents. A youthful voice, vibrant.

Whether to expect a knife thrust out of the darkness, or whether this was a genuine act of friendliness, Ford was uncertain. He could hear the girl's breathing now; she was feeling her way carefully along the ledge. And he crouched alert, tense.

"Speak to me." The low whisper was almost in his ear. "Let me hear your voice, so I will know where you are."

"I'm here, not three feet away." He ran his fingers over the damp stone in the direction of the voice; encountered a small warm hand stretching toward him.

"Ah-h!" the girl sighed tremulously. "Thanks be to the gods, I have found you, Earthman!" Her soft fingers clutched his own.

Ford thrilled unaccountably at the contact. "Who are you?" he demanded. "Why are you here, in this hell-hole? Why was I set upon by the robot and flung—"

"Sh! Not so loud. And not so fast. I am Nina, of Square House. I learned of what happened to you. There are evil forces of which I may not speak—it is forbidden. But I shall lead you to safety, Earthman."

"Thanks"—dryly. "It seems Owen and I are unwelcome visitors, to some one."

The girl's fingers were pulling at him, gently impatient.

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"It is very good of you, Nina. May I call you that?" He was stumbling after her in his blindness, clinging to her firm slender hand.

"Why not? I am Nina. And who are you, Earthman?" There was unaffected candor in the low voice; natural curiosity.

"I'm Ford Matthews, late of New York and Westchester." He tried to be flippant, but his heart pounded.

"Ford—Matthews! Brother of Paul?" The girl's fingers went limp in his hand, then tightened.

"Yes."

"He knows?" The voice of this Nina was faint and incredulous.

"I told him. Within two minutes that cursed iron man had dumped me down here." Ford's ire was rising. Queer doings in this place, and an undertone of intrigue he didn't like.

"Oh, oh!" the girl was moaning softly. "This is awful!"

Another of those ghastly shrieks echoed in the vast arches of the cavern. A second lightning flash. Ford jerked his head around and saw her sharply outlined against the dripping wall in the brief glare. Dazzling in her wild beauty. A slim figure, shrinking from the light, clad only in a closely fitted swimming-garment. A halo of glorious hair, flashing golden in the swift light. The wide eyes of a frightened child. Parted, trembling lips.

"You're beautiful!" he gasped.

Darkness swallowed her up. There was no response; only a shuddering intake of her breath. Soft fingers fluttered in his grasp.

"QUICK—this way!" the girl was whispering. Tugging with sudden vigor. "In here!"

He saw a dim light and ducked into a low passage after her.

A blue-green flickering came from the walls of the tunnel, giving sufficient light to show the footing.

The girl ran swiftly, and Ford followed on her heels. She was a dim, wraithlike Diana leading him he knew not where. The phosphorescence intensified before them, and she drew close to his side once more, lagging in her steps.

"One of the radium pits!" she explained. "We must be very careful."

Hand in hand again, like two children, they wormed their way out of the constricted mouth of the tunnel onto a narrow shelf circling the inner wall of the green-lit pit. There was a boiling horror down there, a hundred feet below them. A swirling mass of liquid light that sputtered, hissing as thick bubbles gathered and burst, shooting ghastly tongues of sulphurous flame licking upward from the surface.

They hugged the wall and edged along the shelf toward an opening that yawned black on the opposite side. One false step of either and they would have been hurled into the horrid living fire of the pit whose rank odors seared their nostrils, whose weird radiations made awful purple splotches of their flesh and filled the air with tiny charges of energy that scintillated before their eyes.

A gasp came from Nina, and then a pitiful moan. Ford saw that she had cast her eyes into the depths of the pit. Her fingers clutched at him desperately. He followed her gaze.

"What is it?" he yelled.

Then he saw. A shriveled, hairless, ape-figure was crawling laboriously upward from the depths, clinging to ledges and crevices in the wall of the pit. Long arms reached out and pawed blindly for hand-holds. The misshapen body gleamed with a horrible metallic

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luster. Deep black hollows for eyes in the flattened, featureless face. Sightless! Writhing lips of a yellow-fanged mouth. A gruesome creature that had once been a man.

Nina stifled a scream, and covered her eyes. She was trembling. Shaken with horror, Ford vainly tried to soothe her.

"It's he!" Nina sobbed. "I know it's he!"

Then like a frightened gazelle she was off down the passage. It was all he could do to keep pace with her. The tunnel was lighted dimly with the golden glow of regularly spaced disks set in the wall. It must be they were nearing the entrance of Square House.

Two Martians hove into view as he turned a corner.

The girl flung herself, shrieking, in their ready arms.

"Zan! Misor!" she cried. "Take me inside! See that the Earthman is brought through— Oh! I saw him!"

She collapsed, moaning.

"YOU wear this," one of the dwarf-men was saying. He held a black cap of closely woven material in one hand.

"You wish to blindfold me?" Ford raged.

"Yes. Bahspahl command," the Martian intoned smoothly.

"Please put it on, Ford!" Nina begged, arousing. Those wide, dark eyes beseeched him. Tears trembled on the long lashes. What was a man to do?

He walked endlessly in the darkness of the black cap, with a Martian hand clinging to his arm. Up countless stairs. Dank, musty odors pungently assailing his nostrils. The opening and closing of many doors. And then a breath of air, perfumed air. The cap was whisked from his head and he stood there blinking in the soft light of a lady's boudoir.

Paul was there, and the woman. Nina, the two Martians. Owen—stretched moveless on a low divan.

Paul was bellowing. He gripped the shoulders of the girl Nina fiercely.

"How many times have I forbidden you to enter the diggings?" he demanded. "If it happens again, I'll—"

"Paul!" Ford raised his voice angrily. "You're hurting the girl. She was only—"

"Silence! Brother or no brother, I'm ruler here! I'll manage my own household."

Nina had scurried from the room. Ford faced Paul defiantly, his eyes almost on a level with the pale blue ones that pierced him.

"A rotten household!" Ford grated. "With your murderous robots and heaven only knows what monsters living down below. What ails Owen?"

He went to the scientist's side. Feeling for his pulse, raising his lids. A great welt extended across his friend's forehead and ugly bruises showed at his throat. But the pulse was regular and his breathing steady. Knocked out, that was all—he'd be coming around in a few minutes.

But Ford was furiously angry. He jumped to his feet, snarling:

"More work of your iron killers! What does it all mean—what I saw below; the blindfolding? Answer me!"

The woman had risen with a smile, ready to greet Ford in drawing-room manner, as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened. At his outburst she sobered, her eyes wary and lithe body tensed like a cat's.

The big man clenched a huge fist, then dropped it to his side. His scowl gave way to a haggard, beaten look.

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"I can't tell you," he growled. "Listen, Ford: nobody invited you, here. You have no rights. You'll have to take things as they are. Certain affairs you must not know. I say hands off—get it?"

A glance passed between Paul and the woman. Ford thought he saw swift triumph in her eyes. He felt his hands clenching. If he could only get to the bottom of this hidden tragedy!

CHAPTER VIII.

STOLEN RAIN.

LATE the following morning Ford met Owen in the comfortable library of the suite assigned to them. They had slept long, exhausted as they were. Though both were stiff and sore, they were much refreshed, almost encouraged. Suddenly Owen asked:

"What do you think of Carlotta Matthews?"

"Can't make her out," the younger man replied. "Whether she's just one of those intense, capricious creatures or a she-devil."

"Nor I. The woman is madly in love with Paul, but still I don't trust her. She's a good nurse, though, I'll say that." The scientist screwed up his eyes comically from under the bandage she had placed over his wound.

"H'm! I saw she was very gentle with you, and you didn't seem to mind a bit." Ford chuckled.

"You weren't backward with little Nina," his friend retorted.

Ford caught his breath. The girl had got under his skin. Then, startled, his gaze turned to the broad window that faced out on the Square. It had darkened suddenly outside and torrential rains were sweeping across the pane.

"Look, Owen! They've started the projector. We must do something about it—at once!"

"Yes"—dryly. "We must speak to Paul. Perhaps he will shut it off."

"Tell you what, Owen; we'll get the visiphone and show him. Let him see and hear what's happening on Earth. For all his gruffness and his secrets, he has a heart—"

"Bahspahl send for you," a Martian voice interrupted from the door. The servant Paul had turned over to them stood there smiling.

"All right, Quin."

Ford chuckled when the little fellow had bowed himself out.

"Makes me think of an Irish office boy of mine—name, grin and all."

He sobered then, and glanced out at the dark downpour with a shudder. His thought of the cheerful Irish kid turned to agony as he realized what a hell of terror the blood-red drought was now making on Earth; what gruesome horrors his friends and his loved ones were suffering. Gangs must be roaming the streets, stealing what little water there was, looting and killing. Cities burning, without the water to put them out. Mobs of fanatics storming the government, hanging, lynching, howling wth insane glee, trampling the weak under foot. He could imagine the wails of stricken women, men and children, as humanity saw its precious water supply vanishing.

BOSS PAUL was in a bitter mood when he met them in the big room.

"Good morning," he said, but there was little cordiality in his tone.

They returned his salutation.

"Good breakfast?"

"Except for the blue melon," Owen

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objected, with a wry face. Paul scowled. It was not an encouraging start.

"You agreed to consider shutting off the main machine," Ford said.

"I did, though I doubt if what you say will change my plans."

Ford turned to the scientist. "Will you rig up the visiphone, Owen?"

"Yes. If there's an umbrella—"

"Quin can go with you," growled Paul.

Ford had been examining the floor where the trap-door had opened. There was not the slightest evidence of its existence. He looked at his brother long and earnestly, remembering that night when the great rocket had screamed into the skies.

"Paul," he said, "why don't you drop this rain idea and return to Earth with us? You can bring Carlotta and Nina. Let the Martians shift for themselves."

Paul's eyes held a far-away look for a moment, then flared defiance.

"No! You don't understand; you never will. The Runds—that's what the Martians call themselves; we called them 'runts' when we first came—are a helpless people. We belong to them. We never hoped to leave Mars, as the explosive required by the rocket ship couldn't be duplicated here, so we made ourselves part of their lives. Their problems are ours. If they do not have this water they will die off in less than five Tironian years. They must have it at any cost."

"There is no other way of obtaining it?"

"None."

"But there are other planets."

"I've tried them. None of those having water will yield it but Earth. I don't believe it will be as serious for them as you think; I'll leave some."

Paul's voice had a cold ring to it that made Ford shiver. For he knew that even with a small part of Earth's water stolen, the thing meant untold disaster.

"How many of these Runds are there?" he asked, trying a new tack.

"About two million. They are scattered over a few thousand square miles along the equator. The rest of the planet is dead—parched and lifeless. We circled it for many days before we landed, looking for signs of habitation."

"And for only two millions of the odd gnome-folk you'd sacrifice many times that number of your own kind—hundreds of millions, maybe? I'll admit the Runds are likable; pathetic in their downfall from the ancient glory and might of their ancestors, but—"

"That's enough! There are other reasons."

The Boss rose, jerkily. His eyes were haunted now, staring into the depths of that dread secret which seemed to be with him always.

OWEN entered, shivering, and shaking the water from his eyes. He set the visiphone on the table with a triumphant gesture.

In rapid technical language he gave Paul the story of this marvelous development of television that had come since the rocket left Earth. Told of the Newscasters, who delved into and spread afar all secrets of this latter-day world of theirs. Of their great central transmitters which could span these millions of miles of empty space. And the Boss listened absorbedly.

"Let's see it work," he demanded.

"—while from Kansas come the reports that the wheat crop is utterly blasted." The voice of the announcer was panicky. "An exceptionally large crop was in prospect for this year; now

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it seems there will be none. The rich fields are—but wait; here is an image flash from Wanaque Reservoir in northern New Jersey."

The announcer's visage faded from view and his voice broke off. Ford's throat tightened with homesickness. Paul's face was a mask.

A second announcer took over the newscast. On the disk was pictured a great wall of concrete and a broad expanse of red-lit waters. The angle of the view was such that they saw the sun low on Earth's horizon, a vast globe of smoldering fire. Crimson! The color of blood.

"You will observe there is no water spilling over the dam," came the eerie voice from out the vastness of space. "Already the level has dropped more than two feet under the dire influence of this red curse that has come to our world. And to-day the rate of evaporation is even more rapid—"

"Evaporation!" Paul snorted.

Owen was watching him keenly. He must learn the secret of this pilferage of Earth's water. True, there had been no evaporation.

The scene changed. International Newcasts were providing an aërial survey for their patrons. A transmitter was being carried over certain badly affected sections of the middle west.

The voice of the announcer droned on as they passed over a rolling countryside. "That tiny trickle at your right was a sizable river two days ago. It was fed by many smaller streams that now are entirely dried up. That pond—there, you see, directly ahead—was a lake. Observe the whitening cracks in the caked mud surrounding the shrinking pool. The livestock you see wandering aimlessly over the fields are searching for water. Ranches are being deserted by their owners, who have fled to the cities, especially around the Great Lakes."

Ford noticed that Paul's fingers tapped the table casually. He was bored, or else he was thinking deeply. His bearded face, alight from flickering reflections of the disk, was immovable.

"NOW we turn you over to the news center in Washington," the voice droned on. "Official warning is given that the militia and the police will not tolerate gatherings in the public places. Martial law has been declared, and hysterical demonstrations such as those of yesterday are not to be permitted. Citizens are further cautioned against indulging in undue excitement over the red twilight. It is safest to remain in your homes and await the passing of this second cosmic cloud. The Naval Observatory reports it much smaller than the first; it is to be passed through quickly. Heavy rains are to be expected late this afternoon east of the Mississippi."

"Fakers!" Owen scathed. "Why do they keep up this deceit? Fools! They build up public faith, only to destroy it."

A swelling murmur came from the viewing disk. They saw a crowd storming the portals of a great public building—the Capitol.

"As if Congress could do anything about it!" Owen said bitterly.

Shots rang out. There were desperate men in that mob, unreasoning and fear-crazed.

A stentorian voice was calling for them to disperse. They saw a machine gun crew crouched along the wall. More shots and little puffs of white dust spurting from the wall near the khaki-clad gunners. One of the sol-

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diers, a young boy—they could see his smooth cheeks plainly—rose clutching at his throat, amazed disbelief written in his agonized countenance. Then he toppled amongst his fellows.

The hideous stuttering of machine guns. Frantic screams from the mob. Bodies piling there; wounded men and women crawling over them, whimpering. The pavement slippery with blood. And the red twilight brooding darkly over all.

"Enough!" Paul shuddered. "Turn it off. I don't want to see such things. Turn it off, I say."

There was a click and the disk became dark.

"COME," said Paul, and he strode from the room.

Ford and Owen followed, still breathing hard. It had been a terrible thing to see their fellow men wallowing in their own blood, vainly spilling it in frantic conflict with the inevitable.

They came out on a balcony overlooking the Square of Thren-dis. The heavens had opened to spout forth such a deluge as had not come to the planet Mars in a thousand centuries. The great plaza was a wading pool where hundreds of half-naked Rund children splashed and cavorted in their glee. Their elders watched them from the sidelines, and on every round face was a happy smile. Little they cared that their clothing was soaked; that their feet were in water to the ankles. It was their salvation, this miraculous rain the Bahspahl had brought to them. Tiron was to have a new lease of life. Once more it would bloom with sweet flowers.

"Another story, you see," Paul said solemnly.

"But see here!" Owen cried in panic at seeing how moved the big man was by the Martians' joy. "There must be some other way. Shut off this ray generator of yours, and I'll work out some other way of getting water."

"You've never done it, have you?" Paul demanded gruffly. "Disintegrated the atom?"

"Yes—the fuel of my space ship. Let me—"

The big man broke in with a short laugh.

"Fuel! That's nothing! I could do that five years ago—simple disintegration. The man who discovered that for me—he's a Rund—has tried everything. Lives with his books and calculations. There's only one way to get water on Mars—"

"Listen to me!" said Owen crisply. "I don't care what you've tried. You may have overlooked the simplest way. You don't want to change the climate all at once, anyhow—the Runds would die. They aren't used to it. Turn off the machine for ten days, and I'll have water for you—I swear it!"

Paul turned away impatiently and gazed across the dripping Square for several minutes. Then he growled, as though he was ready to hate these Earthmen for interfering with his plans:

"You're right so far—the Runds couldn't stand a rainy climate suddenly. Take the ten days. That's long enough for you to learn how tough this water proposition is."

He strode to a visiphone cube near the door of the balcony and gave curt orders to the men running the ray projector up on the mesa.

Nina was there; she'd been watching them from inside. Her fresh young beauty smote Ford anew. He moved to her side, the hot blood mounting to his temples.

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But the girl was listening to Paul where he spoke rapidly into the black cube. And a look of horror crept over her cameo-like features as the words rattled forth.

"No, no!" she moaned when he had finished. "You can't cut off this beautiful rain! The Runds—they will suffer again."

"Hush, Nina! They can't stand much water. They aren't used to it." The big man of Thren-dis looked down on her with amused tolerance.

"But the ray machine may not work next time! You've been trying for this rain ever since I can remember. And now when you have it you listen to these Earthmen and shut it off!"

She turned from him, bending her tearful gaze on Ford.

"Oh, why did you come here? Why have you used influence on him?"

Weeping, she ran from the room.

CHAPTER IX.

TEN DAYS OF HOPE.

WITH Owen spending every waking hour in the laboratory of Square House, or out in the huge workshop on the mesa of the rain machine, Ford was left with much time on his hands.

But it did not drag. The girl Nina had taken him in tow, no longer rebellious that the rain had been shut off. She was a Martian, however, born and brought up among the Runds; as much one of them as if her sympathetic spirit had been housed in a gnome-body. She could not see why the people of Earth were more deserving of the benefits of the rain than they.

Ford explained patiently, telling her of the seriousness of the situation in his own land, the land of her father and mother. He pictured vividly the things he had seen; tried to tell her of the vast numbers of the Earth folk, of their lives and ambitions. But his people did not impress her as particularly admirable. To her they seemed foolish in the face of a dangerous drought. The Runds had fought the same battle bravely. She was resigned to the action of her stepfather only on the basis of his ten-day promise.

Carlotta, he found to his surprise, treated him with the utmost respect and with friendly overtures that certainly were sincere. And she was more than tolerant of his growing friendship with the daughter.

They spent many hours, he and Nina, rambling in the streets and public places of Thren-dis. She took him into the homes of many gnomes and proudly exhibited him to her friends. To them, it was apparent, she was a goddess, to be adored along with the ancient gods of their ancestors. She had interceded at Square House for many of them in the past. She was the guardian angel of Thren-dis and of all Tiron.

Ford managed to pick up a few words of the queer language of the Runds. At the end of the fifth day he found that he was enjoying himself hugely. And, strangely, his heart went out to these gnome-folk who were beloved of Nina.

There was a wheezing and rattly old automobile, built years ago by engineers out of parts taken from the rocket, and used in a vain search over a large part of Mars for certain chemicals. Carefully built, it was still in fair shape. As Owen and Paul were using the space ship in their frequent visits to the mesa, the "fire chariot" was at the service of Ford and Nina.

Carlotta refused to be budged from

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her comfortable quarters in Square House, but the young couple made numerous trips over the hard-packed sands of the drylands and along the canal banks in the bouncing old car.

On one of these excursions they stopped beside an ancient canal-lock whose crumbling ruins had become a favorite spot from which to view the sunset. Ford had not got over the wonder of these iridescent purple sunsets of Tiron.

"You love all this, don't you, Nina?" he asked, when they had rested in silence for many minutes.

"It is my life. Of course I love it. I should die if I were to leave it."

"You would not care to visit Earth?" Ford was contemplating the smooth-whiteness of her throat as he asked the question. He saw the muscles tense under the velvet skin.

"I'd hate it. There's wickedness on Earth. And avarice; greed that destroys. My own father—" The girl bit her lips and the color went from her face. She stared off over the drylands.

"Go on," Ford said gently.

"No." Her voice was choked but determined. "It is forbidden. I must say no more. Shall we return to Square House?"

Nina was moodily silent throughout the drive homeward.

PAUL and Owen joined them for dinner that night, something they had not done for several days. Both were gloomy and preoccupied.

"Any luck?" Ford inquired of his friend.

"None thus far. But I still have hopes."

"You don't seem very enthusiastic."

"It's the Runds, Ford. Their staring eyes and bleached skins. They look at me out there, the workmen, as if I were robbing them of their hope of continued life. And it is so. The drylands are now as terrifying as before; the canals are parched."

"You two mustn't be talking shop," Carlotta reproved them from the head of the table.

She smiled in the approved manner of a hostess of Earth.

"Your pardon," Owen said politely.

Nina spoke up with some small talk of the gnome-folk.

It was all so like a similar scene back home that Ford sat staring with his fork poised in mid-air. Were it not for the silent and efficient Runds who served the Martian vegetable courses, he might have thought he was dining with friends in Larchmont or New Rochelle. To think that the fate of worlds lay in the hands of two men at this table; that horror and dark mystery stalked in the sub-surface realm beneath them was mad imagining.

And then the lights were extinguished. An explosive grunt from Paul; Nina's low, startled cry. But not a sound from Carlotta.

"Keep your seats!" Paul commanded.

They heard Paul's chair flung violently on its back; his heavy steps as he blundered through the darkness, followed by soft, rustling sounds.

"Let me go with you!" Ford pleaded, rising precipitately. His plate clattered to the floor, making a hideous racket as it fell.

"Ford, better take it easy," Owen said calmly.

"Devil take him!" Ford snarled. "For two cents I'd—"

"You'd do nothing of the sort. Sit down." Owen was unmoved.

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"Nina!" Ford whispered.

Still no reply. The others must have gone with him.

"Well, this is the damnedest place I've ever seen!" Ford growled. He felt for his chair and slumped to its padded seat.

"I agree with you," Owen whispered. "Ford, there must be human beings down there in the diggings. Prisoners or slaves—victims of Paul's love for his Martian people, perhaps, or madmen."

"You mean—"

"Some of those who came in the rocket ship! How else could all these mysterious things happen? One of them with a robot-control must have sent the mechanical men to kill us. I'm sure it wasn't Paul."

"Then they are enemies of Paul and of us?"

"Exactly."

Ford's mind was in a whirl. Was Paul keeping some of the survivors of that expedition out of sight for a purpose? Or had they willingly leagued themselves with other monsters who dwelt in those fearsome diggings?

The diffused light of walls and ceiling flickered on now, dimly. Steadied to normal brilliance. The other places at the table were empty, as Ford had guessed.

"At any rate," he said after a silence, "Paul seems to have the upper hand, and the confidence of the Runds. They worship him!"

"They should," Owen returned feelingly. "He has educated them, taught them the forgotten arts of their ancestors, made scientists of some."

"Yes, and they bear out his story of the deaths of the others. But they are reticent, at that. The last, they say, died s o o n after the completion of Square House, when Thren-dis was still in construction. What a strange state of affairs!"

Paul entered the room, smiling, with the ladies on his arms. As if nothing had happened. But there was a certain shiftiness in his manner, and Carlotta's long lashes veiled her expressive eyes. Nina was ghastly white.

"Just a little trouble with the generators, Owen," Paul blustered, obviously trying to conceal his agitation. "Come ahead, we must get back on the job. You can do without the last course, can't you?"

"Surely." Owen was on his feet, moving with alacrity to follow.

EIGHT of the ten days for Owen's experiment had passed when next Ford had opportunity of talking with the scientist alone. The older man was tired and drawn.

"Nothing doing yet," he sighed in response to Ford's anxious query. "It is very elusive, what we are trying to do. Worse, it would seem, than my gravity-wave."

"Think you'll do it by the tenth day?"

"It looks dubious. I'll say this, though: that brother of yours is a worker. He's wearing me ragged. Knows a thing or two, besides."

"Just as anxious as we are, isn't he?" Ford was commencing to feel much of his old admiration for Paul. He had changed greatly, of course, and there was this grim secret of the diggings. But Paul had been t h r o u g h many trials in these twenty years.

"Anxious or not," Owen warned, "he'll stick to his ultimatum of the tenth day."

Ford had been sure of that. Conditions in the Rund villages were growing steadily worse. And then Paul was the sort of man who did what he

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said he would, there was no balking him.

He followed Owen into his bedroom, where the older man disrobed slowly, with fingers that fumbled.

"Do you know, Ford," he was saying drowsily, "I wish some one else from our world had this job. Some of the smart Alecks who know so much about everything. They'd have something to think about."

Ford grinned affectionately. Owen had crawled between the silken sheets. His lids were leaden. Still his old animosities were strong within him.

"Besides," the scientist continued, "I haven't as much heart in it as I had. The Runds—hate to see them get it in the neck, the poor devils . . ."

Owen Wardell was asleep. Ford slipped quietly from the room.

MORNING dawned clear and without a breeze, as did every morning under normal conditions on the dying planet. Owen already had left when Ford awakened. Dressing hurriedly, Ford stepped out on the balcony that faced the Square. His pulses quickened. He knew he would meet Nina, and somehow that early meeting each day was becoming a momentous occasion.

He had never thought a mere girl could set his pulses throbbing this way. None of those he had met on Earth had affected him like this. Confound it, he was falling in love!

Sitting by the usual embrasure, he saw her. A spot of vivid color in the drab surroundings and a figure of ineffable grace, she sat there with chin cupped in her hands looking out over the Square toward the platform which had been built for the space ship. The Martian sunrise made liquid fire of her red-gold hair.

"Nina!" he whispered.

She looked up at him with shining eyes.

"Ford!"

She moved aside, making room for him on the bench.

"You seem very happy this morning," he said.

"I am. To-morrow is the last day my people must suffer. On the day following it will rain."

"Oh!" Ford fell silent. That was depressing.

"Only think," she went on; "if Paul has not miscalculated, we shall have our canals well filled in forty days. The reservoirs, and all. There will be enough, he says, to restore normal conditions for more than a century. The reds and blues of the hills will return. New vegetation will spring up—everything will be as it was in ages past."

"You've never seen green fields, green hills?" Ford's gaze was far off in the heavens; his heart suddenly heavy.

"No! Green?" Nina was wide-eyed, incredulous.

"Yes, on Earth they are green. At least, they were, before this thing we call the red twilight. Now, if Paul and Owen fail—"

"Oh, Ford, I'm sorry!" Nina's soft fingers twined in his. "I believe I know how you feel— Like I do about my own land here. Only with me it is more real, the disaster we hope to avoid. It has been threatening so long. And now there is hope. You see, don't you?"

Ford could not answer. Their viewpoints diverged widely. He looked out into the emerald sky at the tiny pinpoint of light that was his own world. Visible still by reason of the rare atmosphere, it was unthinkably remote.

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Helpless in the hands of the fate that hung now by so slender a thread.

For the first time since they left Earth he despaired, utterly.

CHAPTER X.

ZERO HOUR.

LATE the following night Ford paced the floor of Owen's room, awaiting news of the experiment. The final hour of the time allowed by his brother had arrived, and still there was no word from the workshop on the mesa. Ford had tried the radiophone in vain; the black cubes did not respond. In his heart he knew Owen had failed.

On the morrow rain would come again to Tiron. And on Earth the red twilight once more would take its toll. Day after day the thing would go on until—but his mind refused to picture the final death-struggle of humanity.

Nine and Carlotta had retired. They had been careful to avoid the subject that evening. Yet he well knew they rejoiced inwardly that the rains were to come within so very few hours. Rain was so sadly needed in the farm lands surrounding Thren-dis and in the almost empty canals and reservoirs of Tiron. Were Owen to discover a way out, the two would have acclaimed it gladly. But serious consideration of his own world was not in their thoughts. Knowing what he did of the past twenty years, he could scarcely blame them.

Yet Ford was a man of Earth. Though he never gave thought to the matter before the coming of the red twilight, he knew now that his own land meant more to him than life itself. Its peaceful valleys and majestic heights. The swift rivers; mirrorlike lakes. Even the cities. Humankind. Weak and frivolous, but his own.

There had been moments of the past few days when, under the spell of Nina's eyes, he had been willing to forget—had forgotten. For the love of women much less desirable, strong men had overthrown kingdoms of Earth; sent thousands of their fellow men to their deaths. Might not he, and without censure, renounce his Earth ties and remain here? Win Nina as his own. Forget.

Resolutely Ford put Nina from his thoughts.

He tried to put himself in Paul's place, remembering him as the reckless youth of twenty years ago. Remembering, too, what he had seen here and what had been told him of the succeeding years.

Those rash adventurers had found Mars a dying planet, barren and arid, but peopled with friendly and lovable folk. Unable to leave, they had set about making homes for themselves and improving conditions for the natives.

They had taken apart the big rocket ship and used its mechanisms; the machine tools of its repair shop. They had contrived robots which they could control by radioed voice impulses. These were for the heavier and more dangerous tasks. The Runds assisted them in the more delicate work, proving themselves most willing and apt pupils in the knowledge and science of Earth. Square House rose up; and Thren-dis.

Many of Paul's companions had died. Here there was uncertainty and conflicting report. But Paul lived on, a mighty figure.

There was Carlotta Best, widowed and with an infant daughter. A fascinating and beautiful woman. These

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two were the sole adults of their kind in the land. Mated by Rund law, they gradually forgot their former lives on Earth; transferred their allegiance to the adopted home. They were truly Martians.

At once they had found that water was scarce. The ancient pumps which supplied the canals and irrigating ditches drew less and less from the subsurface sources on which the Runds had relied for many generations. All were faced with extinction.

Deeply concerned, Rund leaders had consulted Bahspahl.

Paul then set about his experiments, and discovered a force that would disrupt the atoms, separating the protons and electrons of hydrogen and oxygen that comprised water. These subatomic energy charges could be reassembled, and the water restored. The force could be carried over a beam of ether vibrations.

Terrible as the effect of the rays had been on Earth, however, Ford had to admit that if he were in Paul's place he would have done the same. Nothing could have made him give up the plan.

OWEN returned, a haggard wreck of his former self. Paul was with him.

"You've failed!" Ford knew what the answer would be.

Paul nodded, while Owen flung his lean length across the bed. Not unkindly Paul said:

"It was too much to expect." He strolled to the window and looked vacantly into the Square. "We have attempted the impossible, Ford. To produce water, combining two atoms of hydrogen with one of oxygen is possible. A laboratory experiment, accompanied by an explosion, in which only a few droplets of the precious liquid are formed. On the large scale we require—it's impossible! And my beam is of no avail except in the way it is used."

"The red twilight must come to Earth again?"

"To-morrow." Paul had not turned his head from the window. And Owen stretched there silent; he was incapable of speech.

Ford gulped. "Give it another trial, Paul!" he begged. "A few more days. There has to be a way!"

"I can't do it." His face was immovable as stone. "In the outlying provinces there is suffering even now. Several villages in the Zin-tar district have been abandoned. My Runds, patient and trustful though they be, are complaining. A delegation visited me to-day. I can not explain to them."

"Paul!" Ford was desperate. "You owe these people nothing! They were doomed before you came. Come back with us in the space ship. Bring Carlotta and Nina. Destroy the rain machine before we leave. Let them work out their own salvation."

Owen had raised himself to sit cross-legged on the bed. He regarded his young friend with amazement, expecting an outburst from Paul.

But Paul was thoughtful now.

"I might persuade Carlotta," he answered, "but I'm afraid of Nina. She'd refuse, and if I tried force she'd lose herself in the diggings. Carlotta then would—well, both of them would be lost to me. There are other reasons."

And Nina would be lost to Ford. He groaned at the thought.

"Owen!" Ford asked, abandoning the first line of attack, "could you solve the water problem if you had more time?"

"There is a chance, of course." Owen was not hopeful.

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"Paul—give him that chance!" Ford was grasping at straws. "You can hold off the Runds; they've waited all these years. What difference will a few days make to them? How great a difference to Earth—"

He was interrupted by the screeching of many voices in the Square. Loud cries of alarm rose suddenly; voices calling out to Bahspahl, to the gods of ancient Tiron.

"Look!" Paul shouted, drawing aside the curtain. "Your ship, Owen; there must be fire inside!"

The space ship, its fifty foot height of curved steel hull plate glowing red hot, swayed there on its platform in the Square. Excited Runds were rushing into the area from the side streets, swarming over the pavements so recently deserted, gathering in huddled groups to view with superstitious awe this amazing phenomenon.

With a choked cry Owen bounded to his feet and streaked from the room. Ford and Paul clattered down the broad stairs after him.

NO fire from within heated the hull of the space ship, but a blast of radiant energy from beneath. They saw its blue streamers crackling from the pavement underneath the platform.

Shrieking, the Runds fell back as the shell of the craft heated to dazzling whiteness.

Rooted to the spot, Ford watched, speechless, as the space ship collapsed and melted away. Little rivulets of its sparkling liquid metal spread over the pavement, sending forth tongues of blue-white flame in their wake.

Paul was struggling with Owen, dragging the maddened scientist out from the zone of danger. A section of the pavement sagged, and blobs of flowing metal dripped through. The intense light died down and all that remained of the vessel in which Owen and Ford had spanned the heavens was a thickening mass of glowing fused material.

"Those devils from the underground—they've done this!" Owen babbled. "They've sent out a raiding party... We're trapped on Mars now! Doomed to remain—shut off from our own world—"

Paul was laughing, a hideous sound in the Martian night. A maniacal light was in his eyes. Shaking Owen, he was, thrusting forward his bearded jaw; yelling in the drawn white face of the other.

"Shut off, eh? I'll say you are! Like we were twenty years ago. You'll know now what it's like. You'll do as I did, Owen Wardell, and you'll come to the same conclusion. We'll see now, Owen, whether the welfare of Earth is more important than your own. Self-preservation, you know, is man's primal urge."

"Paul!" Ford laid a hand on his arm, wrenched free his grip on the shaken scientist.

The big man of Square House subsided. Then he had broken away from them; he was back there among the Runds, his great voice rolling out over the Square as he endeavored to quiet them. Telling them the danger was past; asking them to return to their homes. Promising rain for the morrow.

AWAKENED by the uproar outside, Nina and Carlotta had come out on the balcony of Square House. Ford saw the feral glitter in the older woman's eyes when she drew Paul aside, clinging to him in an agony of apprehension.

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"Don't go down into the diggings!" she was moaning. "Paul, promise me you won't go down!"

A vivid memory of that metallic, ape-like figure clinging to the side of the radium pit flashed before Ford's eyes. He shivered.

"Ford!" Nina was at his side, more alluring than ever in the dim light from the Square. Her slim body enfolded in a shimmering negligee. "Please don't take it too hard. It is fate; a thing you must feel is for the best. Tiron welcomes you with open arms. You will be happy here."

Mechanically, Ford nodded. The awful significance of the calamity had not struck him in its full force yet. He was dazed.

But the wide eyes looked up at him, pitying and beseeching. The fragrance of her tumbled hair was in his nostrils. Swiftly he folded her in his arms, drew her close. Kissed her upturned, yielding lips. Lost himself in the wondering knowledge that his feeling for her was reciprocated. Time stood still.

A long while after, he gripped the balcony rail and stared off into the night. The others had gone in. Owen, his narrow shoulders drooping. Paul and Carlotta whispering, excited. Nina, suddenly abashed and self-conscious, had slipped from his arms and was away on twinkling feet.

He was alone, and the hideous truth smote him with staggering force. The breath-taking wonder of this love that had come to him was submerged in his thoughts of Earth. To-morrow the red twilight would return.

Never again to feast his eyes on the beauties of Earth's forests and fields. Never to battle the surf on a wind-whipped shore; to breathe in the salt tang of an ocean breeze. To be a part of the bustling life of Earth; to throw himself whole-heartedly into her whirlpool of social and business activity.

Yet Ford could not down the idea that somewhere there was still a solution. To save humanity now would mean an almost hopeless battle, but he would never give up.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

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Bulldog Vampires

AT an elevation of ten thousand feet in Peru vampire bats of great size and resembling bulldogs are numerous. The resemblance is because of the bat's undershot jaw, cropped ears, and broad muzzle. Its legs are well developed and heavy, enabling it move on the ground with the true bulldog waddle.

In the bulldog vampire the gullet is restricted and only fluid can enter the stomach. They are the terror of farmers because they attack late at night while most persons are asleep, their victims being cattle, horses, mules, and donkeys. They are particularly hard to see because their flight is low, and close to the earth.

Vampires of this type have teeth only fitted for incisions and none for grinding. For this reason they must find blood. Many stories of humans being attacked by vampires are rife in Peru. But none of them seem to be well authenticated.

Charles Adams.

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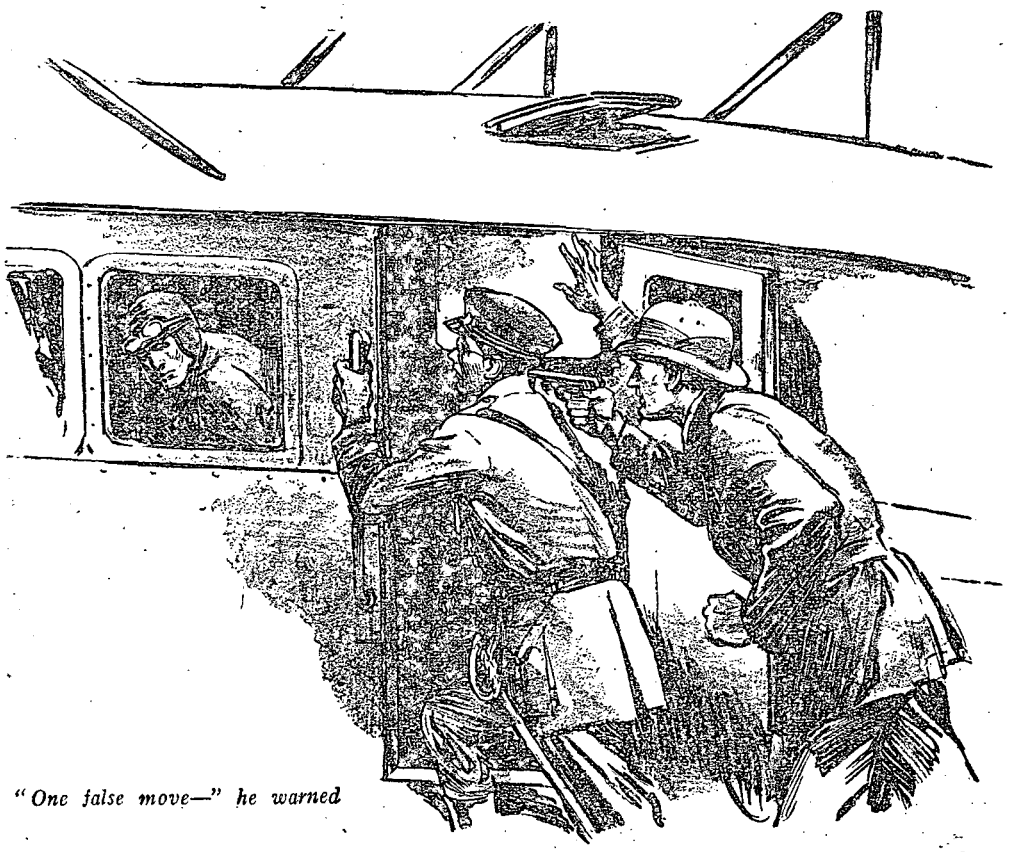

"One false move—" he warned

Diplomacy by Air

Vincent Connor's political intrigues were so secret and successful that they puzzled all China; but this blow drove him to open and reckless action

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

VINCENT CONNOR sat in the lounge of the Tientsin Club and stared dully at the telegram in his hand; the wording of it had knocked him into a chair. In more than one sense, the props were swept out from under him.

About him was the luxury of the club—uniformed boys, English and American business men nodding good morning to him, privately thinking him an idler who had inherited the Connor fortunes and was doing nothing to preserve or enlarge them. Outside was the scurry of Tientsin — Chinese voices, shrill and singsong, the rattle of trams, the honk of automobile horns. The only real thing was here in his hand.

Until now, Connor had not known just how much he depended on the old man down in the south—old Chang, his father's partner in all the great Connor interests that stretched half

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across China. Only Chang had known of his, Vincent Connor's, secret work; to Chang, he was no polo-playing dawdler, but a man who did things that changed the business and political life of all China. From Chang, too, had frequently come the call to action. But no more of those cryptic letters would arrive now.

Chang, on the inside of all the chaotic intrigue that had torn China asunder, was dead.

Connor stirred himself. He read the message again. Chang had been up the river at Changsha when the "red" army of General Ng Fu looted that city; he had been shot by General Ng Fu, said the wire. Chang was a British subject, too, born in Hongkong. Lifting his eyes, Connor caught sight of the British vice-consul crossing the club lobby.

"I say, Foster!" he called, maintaining his casual mask with an effort. "Have you a moment? A question of diplomatic etiquette or something. Suppose one of your Hongkong subjects were to be killed by the Chinese—"

Foster groaned. "What redress, eh? None, my dear chap, none whatever, except a claim for damages against somebody. None of these bandit generals are responsible. We can't touch 'em, and as you know, there's no central government that can touch 'em. Like your Chicago gunmen. Best way is to wait until they kill each other off, ruin the country, and let some one man rise to the top of the stew."

"No punitive measures are possible, in such a case?"

"We've no Mussolini in England, old chap. More's the pity!"

Connor sank back into his chair and lit a cigarette, thoughtfully. True, China was in total chaos. There were plenty of patriotic Chinese, anxious for good government: men of affairs, educated men—but they were lost in a country gone mad with loot and graft. Men like old Chang.

"It's every man for himself," thought Connor. His sunburned features, wide-angled and resolute, set in grim lines. A sudden flash lighted the blue eyes under his black brows. "So! Then why not buy chips in the game, eh?"

The idea stirred in him. For months, now, he had worked beneath the surface, had handled job after job, for the sake of that China which had furnished his fortune and by which he now existed. None suspected his activity, though more than one European and Asiatic government wondered why its plans had gone amiss. But now—well, this was something different.

Connor stirred, took his hat and stick, and went down to the general offices where the Connor interests were handled. In his own office he caught up the telephone and finally ran Bert Swann to earth. Swann was not one of the socially elect. He had drifted in from somewhere with an airplane and a load of loot—rumor said that he had been flying for one of the war lords, and being unable to get any salary, had taken the crate and skipped with it. Probable enough, too.

"Swann? Connor speaking—Vincent Connor. Met you the other day at the races."

"Oh, sure! The gilded youth. I remember now," said Swann impolitely. "How's things?"

"Fair enough. Will that air wagon of yours fly?"

"Yeah, if the sheriff's after me it will. Why?"

"Come up to the Tientsin Club and

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lunch with me at one. We'll talk business."

"Can do. Thanks."

CONNOR'S general manager tapped and entered, an anxious look on his broad celestial face.

"A man is here, a Shensi man by his accent, though he can speak English. His name is Sui, but he says only that he wishes to see you privately. It is unusual, perhaps dangerous. He has the look of a rat."

Connor smiled. "The tiger does not fear rats. Let him enter."

Mr. Sui entered. He wore European clothes, and spoke perfect English. Accustomed from his boyhood to deal with Chinese, Connor read trickery and craft in the man's yellow face; a small man, with silky voice.

"You are Mr. Connor? I think I saw you at Yale, four years ago—you were graduating, and I was there for six months. I am sorry that I am not on a pleasant errand, Mr. Connor."

"Yes?" said Connor.

"You see, I represent General Ng Fu. You may have heard of him."

Connor nodded quietly. "Yes. He has gained some successes recently."

"He will gain more. He has now drawn back to Tienfu, to consolidate his conquests and reorganize his army," said Mr. Sui. "In the district which he now occupies, many of your business interests lie. There are mines, mills, and so forth. Not in your name, but owned by the companies you control."

Connor ground his cigarette in a tray, absently, and eyed the little man.

"You know a good deal about my affairs."

"I know all about them, for that is my business," said Mr. Sui complacently. "My master does not wish to disturb your commercial interests, but plans a complete industrial reorganization in his district. However, a contribution to his treasury—"

"I see, I see," and Connor smiled evenly. Either this agent knew nothing of Chang's murder, or attached no importance to it. "In plain words, blackmail and graft, eh? Well, that's the order of the day in China. What guarantee have I of your honesty?"

"I have a signed protection from General Ng Fu to give upon delivery of the money," said Sui eagerly. "This guarantees you as one of his friends and supporters. Immediately upon getting word from me, he issues protective orders to all of your business interests."

"I see." Connor looked thoughtfully at the other. "I should want to see you put your letter in the post, however — what is the sum demanded?"

"Fifty thousand dollars, gold."

"A hundred thousand Mex, eh? Do you accept checks?" asked Connor dryly.

"Of course."

"Very well," said Connor with the shrug of a man dismissing a boring piece of business. "I must do it, naturally. Hm! I'm playing polo this afternoon—dining with the Hardinges —suppose you come to the Tientsin Club at nine thirty to-night, eh? Bring your papers. How do you want the money?"

"In two checks, if you please." Sweat bedewed the yellow brow, for Mr. Sui had not anticipated so swift and easy a victory. "One for thirty thousand, one for twenty."

"Very well. At nine thirty. You'll be brought to my room at the club."

Mr. Sui departed, walking on air.

Bert Swann turned up at the ap-

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pointed time, and Connor got a table for two in the corner of the club dining room. Swann was a Maine man, a drawling Yankee with a twang to his tongue, with a cold eye, a wide grin, and six feet of solid brawn.

"What do you want?" the flyer demanded bluntly. "Taxi service to Pekin?"

"No. To Tienfu," said Connor.

The other whistled softly. "Are you serious? That's inland and down south—"

"Listen, Swann—get me straight, now," and Connor met the cold eyes squarely. "I'm going to Tienfu. I want to be there before I'm expected. General Ng Fu is there, and I'm either going to shoot him or carry him off from the middle of his own army. Also, I'll have an unwilling passenger to take along. If possible, I want to leave early in the morning. There's part of the scheme on the table. What do you say?"

"Me? I say you're crazy, buddy. It just can't be done."

"Name your price. If we make a dicker, I'll let you in on the fun."

"And the firing squad, eh? All right." The cold eyes of Swann glimmered. "I guess maybe I figured you wrong, buddy. Are you hiring me or taking me in on the ground floor?"

"Suit yourself."

"All right. We're partners, and damn the money! Now give me the story."

AT nine thirty that night, Connor was in his room at the club, with Bert Swann imbibing a long cold drink. Connor had given his general manager certain orders that day in regard to Mr. Sui, and knew they would be carried out to the letter.

When Sui arrived, sleek and debonair and inwardly excited, Connor introduced Swann, then seated himself at the table, opposite his yellow visitor. He produced the two checks demanded and laid them down, putting his Han jade paperweight upon them.

"I made these out to cash," Connor said amiably. "Now for your side of the pact."

Sui opened up his bulky brief case, got out Chinese writing materials and documents, and displayed a large and ornate document on red paper. It was a blank protection, signed by General Ng Fu; when Sui had filled in Connor's name, it told the world that Connor was the friend and supporter of Ng Fu and was to be treated as such.

Blandly pocketing the check for twenty thousand as his commission, Sui brushed a letter to the general inclosing the check for thirty thousand, as Connor's contribution, and giving the agreed terms—namely, that all the Connor enterprises in Ng Fu's district should be exempt from taxation or bother of any kind. He handed the letter to Connor, who, to his obvious surprise, read the characters aloud.

"Fair enough," said Connor. "I'll see that this is sent, myself, and will insure its delivery with the thirty thousand-dollar check to Ng Fu personally. Seal it. Then give me a receipt for the full fifty thousand, to go in my business records."

Sui sealed the letter and Ng Fu's check, which he was entirely willing to trust to Connor, and then wrote out the receipt demanded. The business was concluded. Buckling up his briefcase, he bowed to Connor and Swann, and then departed. Swann grinned.

"And he fell for it! Say, buddy, I got to hand it to you."

"You'd better go pound your ear," suggested Connor, "if we're to leave

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at six in the morning. Rain, fog, or whirlwind, we've got to go."

"We will," said Swann. "We'll have gas enough to make Tienfu, but we'll need a whole lot of luck. This is a crazy party all the way!"

"It 'll have a sane ending," said Connor grimly. Chang had been more than a right-hand man to him. He had been like a benevolent old uncle; and his face loomed before Connor's eyes.

Ten minutes later his general manager called up to say that instructions had been followed. Mr. Sui had been collared on leaving the club, and was in safe keeping.

Six in the morning saw Swann warming up his machine—a Class A monoplane with Whirlwind engine and a gun mounted forward. Connor arrived in his Sunbeam, and the two men with him jerked a frightened, wailing bundle out of the car and into the cabin of the plane.

"Our friend Sui, all complete, even to the brief-case," Connor told the aviator. "Ready? Let's go."

"High time," said Swann. "Some damned government has served notice on me that I can't leave. I dunno how they expect to keep me—"

The rest was lost in the roar of the engine.

So they circled in the sunrise, above the lazy Taku river and its shipping, and over the town and foreign concessions, and straight for the hills. After all, it was far from being so crazy as it seemed or sounded, for Sui's brief-case had yielded a recent map of Tienfu with everything pricked out in detail, including the air field General Ng Fu had constructed for his budding aërial force. And there was only a bit over five hundred miles to go, bee line.

Mr. Sui protested volubly, but nobody paid any attention to him, and he was so securely tied that he could be safely neglected.

"You've been up before?" said Bert Swann, eying this secretive partner of his curiously.

Connor smiled. "I got my pilot's license in my last year at college—that was some time ago, though. Yes, I've been up a few times since. This is a good crate."

"Fairish," admitted Swann, and plunged into a discussion of air-fighting in China.

Connor had brought a basket of lunch, little of which was wasted on the captive, though he was not allowed to suffer. Bert Swann had no map, but flew by compass alone; yet now and again he pointed out objects below—mountains, towns, rivers. Connor marveled.

"It's my job," said the flyer. "I made it my business to know China from the air. No good maps. I can fly anywhere by compass—that is, in the north. I don't know the south so well, down around Yunnan and Canton, and I haven't touched the west. But I've pulled some queer stunts around these parts!"

"You're a wonder," said Connor. The other gave him a queer look.

"So are you, for that matter. I've heard a lot about you—society bird and so on. Nobody thinks you're worth a damn, any more than the average rich youth."

"And what do you think?" queried Connor.

"Quit kidding me, buddy." Swann grinned. "We'll get on, you and I."

THE miles sped behind, with never a miss in the motor; hour after hour sped away, while the stiff and miserable Sui begged unavailingly for mercy and freedom. Finally Swann

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pointed to a range of low hills a short distance ahead.

"There y'are. Beyond them, we'll pick up the river. Tienfu should be about thirty miles south—we're on the big bend here, you know. Ng Fu has two old Jennies, bombers. Might sell him this crate."

Connor nodded. "That's what I intend—only you'll never get any money for it."

Swann laughed gayly, and shot him an admiring glance.

"All right—you're the doctor!"

"Got any ammunition for that gun?" said Connor. "If you have, get it ready as soon as we land. Then trail along with me and see what turns up."

The other nodded.

The hills fled below and behind and they pick up the silver ribbon of the river. Swann came down to two thousand feet, glanced again at Sui's map of the city, and presently Tienfu drew into sight. The landing field, and General Ng Fu's headquarters as well, were outside the old walled town.

Presently they were over the camp and field, and their arrival created obvious excitement, until it was seen that they were descending peacefully. Connor's eyes kindled as he stared down. He knew well that he was doing an absolutely crazy thing, from all normal viewpoints, yet he was thoroughly enjoying himself.

"Good discipline," and he nodded toward the field below, which had been cleared as by magic. "Forming up in ranks—hm!"

The crowd about two airplanes had melted. The rows of tents showed precision; hospital, headquarters, ammunition and food dumps—the whole place had a very military look, by no means usual with China's bandit armies. The machine swooped, landed perfectly, and taxied to a halt before the two Jennies and their hangars.

There was no outrush of the crowd. Two officers, alone, came striding out to the plane, as Connor clambered out. One of the two stepped forward and saluted him briskly.

"I am Colonel Wang Lin, of General Ng Fu's staff," he said in English.

Connor smiled, gave his name, and then proceeded in Mandarin of the old florid style:

"Present the compliments of this unworthy slave to the great venerable ancestor, before whom the earth trembles! I have brought with me one Sui, the Tientsin agent of the lordly maternal uncle, and certain sums of money. I desire an audience—"

"Refreshment awaits you, elder cousin," returned the officer. "Also an audience. Pray come with me, and my men will refuel and condition your machine. Will your pilot accompany us?"

Connor assented, and Bert Swann, leaving helmet and leather coat, fell in with them, slamming the cabin door. Mr. Sui was left to his lamentations.

They proceeded toward headquarters—an old temple a quarter mile distant whose surrounding grove of trees had not been disturbed. Connor knew that he would have no difficulty in seeing his man. The average war lord, upon attaining power, became more invisible than the Son of Heaven, and was invariably surrounded by purchasing agents, grafters, and guards; but Ng Fu had not attained such heights, and was said to be almost democratic in his sway.

Ten minutes later, in fact, they were in his presence.

A room of the temple had been cleared, whitewashed, laid with mats.

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By the unglazed window was a table littered with maps and papers; behind this sat the bandit general—a man of about fifty, with heavy-lidded eyes behind thick spectacles, lines of humor about his mouth, a firm and resolute countenance. Connor would have liked him at first glance, if it had not been for—Chang.

Upon learning the identity of his visitor, Ng Fu shook hands, ordered in tea and cakes and cigarettes, and abandoned all formality.

"I have heard of you," he said in fluent Mandarin, for he was a man of education. "And you have come all this way to see me? When did you leave Tientsin? That is marvelous! What is this about my agent, the traitorous Sui?"

Connor told him, while the listening officers stared silently.

"Here is the sealed letter addressed to you, general. Have the man searched, and you will find the other check in his pocket, I presume. Here is the receipt—"

"For fifty thousand dollars," said Ng Fu, and tore open the sealed letter. He produced the check for thirty thousand. A few words to one of his officers, who left the room, and he smiled grimly at Connor. "We shall see."

Refreshments were brought in. Presently the officer returned and laid the check for twenty thousand dollars before the general, who nodded and turned to Connor.

"You did well to bring that grafting rascal to me! Your story is true. I should like to buy this airplane in which you came; it is far better than my machines. What is your price?"

Connor turned to Bert Swann, who understood little or no Mandarin, and put the question.

"The sky's the limit, buddy," and Swann grinned. "Twenty thousand, or I'll take five."

"Twenty thousand dollars, general," Connor translated, conscious that more than one of the officers around probably understood English. "I think it is too much—"

"Not a cent too much," said Ng Fu cordially. "Here is the money." And he handed Connor the check for twenty thousand. "Now that it is all settled—"

There was a ragged discharge of rifles outside. Connor started, bewildered as he was by the crafty financial manipulation of the bandit general. The latter waved his hand amiably.

"That is nothing—only the execution of my late Tientsin agent. I am anxious to talk with you about the military situation. Here, look at this map—"

HALF an hour later, the general beamed upon his visitor. "Tell me, were you not afraid to venture thus into my hands? Did it not occur to you that I might hold you to ransom or kill you?"

Connor shrugged. Bert Swann, tiring of the talk, had gone forth to look after his machine and gun, and search for something solid in the way of food.

"I didn't think of that, particularly," Connor returned casually. "Would you like to inspect this airplane? It is a fighting machine, and has some interesting features."

"By all means," returned the general heartily. "One moment, until I give certain orders—we are expecting an attack at any time, you know. Have a fresh cigarette."

Connor nodded, and glanced over the map on the desk, while Ng Fu gave orders in regard to certain ammunition and supplies, now being camouflaged.

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As Connor now understood, the bandit general was in a bad way. In retiring from Changsha he had broken with the main communist forces, and his district was now hemmed in by the Nationalist armies, who might be encamped around him for weeks or months, after the fashion of Chinese warfare. While Ng Fu was solidly organized, he could not remain inactive forever, and was facing hugely superior forces. His one hope was that diversions from other quarters might draw the Nationalist armies off and give him a weak point at which to strike. The enemy had a number of airplanes, whose bombs had already damaged him sadly, but he had gone in for camouflage. A shrewd fellow, Ng Fu, ahead of his comrade war lords in brains and craft.

"All ready?"

Attended by four staff officers Connor and the general walked out together, and strode over to the hangers. Again Connor was struck by the discipline prevailing; and Ng Fu pointed out that none of his men were allowed in the town, strict order being kept.

"My district is not a conquered province," he said, "but a source of revenue from well-governed people."

Connor thought of old Chang, shot down without mercy, and his lips tightened.

Coming to the field, Connor saw that Swann was at the controls, warming up his engine, which was allowed to idle as they approached. The mechanics had finished their work. With Connor beside him and the four officers following, General Ng Fu strode toward the machine, beside whose cockpit a set of steps had been placed. Just outside the rush of air from the propeller, he halted, while Connor pointed out the construction and lines of the plane. As he did so, he caught the eye of Swann and gestured slightly. The pilot donned his goggles.

Then, abruptly, Connor slipped the automatic pistol from his armpit holster and jammed it against the neck of the general.

"Tell your officers to fall back!" he exclaimed sharply. "Quick, now! One false move from you or them, and you're done for! March up those steps."

Sharp cries of dismay arose. Connor reached around his prisoner and secured Ng Fu's pistol. Shouts began to go up from every hand, as the plight of their leader was revealed; a babel of discord arose from the watching ranks. Yet it was so obvious that the general himself would catch the first reprisal, that not a shot was fired. Before the astounded, disconcerted watchers could quite realize what was happening, Connor was marching his prisoner up the steps and into the cabin of the machine. Then he slammed the door, which was self-locking.

Swann, at the forward controls, gave her the gun instantly and the engine screamed. Thirty seconds later she was off the ground. Swann turned and grinned.

"Where to, buddy?"

Connor pointed straight up.

"Get altitude and then make for Changsha."

"Got you."

The impossible had been accomplished.

GENERAL NG FU sat holding on very tightly to his chair; never before had he been in the air, but his stolid, impassive countenance betrayed no emotion. Swann climbed steadily into a blue sky speckled with clouds. Presently Ng Fu had the unique experience of looking down

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upon a foamy white sea of cloud and seeing the plane's shadow there.

"Bert!" Connor lifted his voice. "Cut the gun when you get high enough. Want to talk."

Connor hitched his seat around. Ng Fu looked at the pistol, then met Connor's gaze, his sloe-black eyes hard as black jade. All of a sudden there was comparative silence, as the engine was cut down to idling.

"Ng Fu, I'm taking you to Changsha," said Connor. "And I want you to know why."

"I can guess," said the other stolidly. "How much are they paying you? I will double it."

Connor laughed harshly, disagreeably.

"You will not," he retorted. "When your army sacked Changsha, you shot a man deliberately. That man was my friend and partner, Chang Ti-shan, a man known over half of China—a good and wise man, venerated by all who knew him. Because of that act, I'm going to turn you over to the Nationalists and you can stand before a firing squad."

A startled expression leaped into the black eyes.

"What? Is this—do you believe this?"

"I received word of it yesterday. Chang was shot three days ago."

General Ng Fu regarded him steadily for a moment, then slowly smiled.

"What you say of Chang Ti-shan is true," he rejoined. "He was my friend also; he is what Confucius called a superior man."

"And you had him shot, you devil!" said Connor.

"On the contrary. My army did not sack Changsha—that was done by the communists. I kept my troops out of the city. Word came to me that Chang Ti-shan had been seized by the communist chiefs and was to be shot. I went with my bodyguard to their headquarters and took him away in safety. That is why the armies split asunder. The Russian agents with the communist forces were very, very angry. They are not superior men, I have decided."

Connor felt as though the clouds were splitting to let him drop through.

"What?" he cried. In those impassive black eyes he read the truth. "You—can you prove this, Ng Fu?"

"Chang is down there in Tienfu at this moment. I have appointed him governor of the city."

"Good Lord!" Connor sank back, let the pistol fall. "But you must have known about the report—"

"It was good. If China thought that Chang Ti-shan had been shot, it would provoke a wave of resentment. I have found that the communists are selfish men, poor soldiers, dupes of Russian agents." Ng Fu shrugged a little. "So we decided to let the report go out."

Connor stared at his prisoner in dismay. Then, if this were true—

"Hey, buddy!" Bert Swann turned, his voice urgent. "Lock those two steel bars and do it quick! Fasten the belts—move, durn you, move! There's three crates in that cloud ahead—"

"Go on back to Tienfu," ordered Connor.

"You durn fool, jump! You'll be in Hades first thing you know!"

Connor woke up.

Two steel bars locked the chairs in position. He caught the general's safety belt and hurriedly snapped it, then his own; and just in time. The engine sputtered and roared into life.

Bullets smashed into the safety-glass of the window beside them. The three

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planes were from the Nationalist forces, and took the monoplane for one of Ng Fu's crates.

WHAT followed was, momentarily, a wild chaos.

Bert Swann went into a dive, with tracer bullets smoking around him—the three had caught him at a bad moment, and were out to get him. They were old DH machines, however, no match for his fast fighter, once he got into action—and Swann lost no time getting into action.

The chairs swayed dizzily, but were held fast. Out of the dive into a sharp turn, a swift upward zoom; the Hotchkiss gun burst into a quick rattle. A side-slip—

Connor now saw one of the DH machines fluttering down like a bird with a broken wing. The impassive Chinese flinched suddenly—the glass beside him leaped full of holes. Blood spurted from his arm. He made no sound, sat stolidly as ever, after that first startled jump.

Then a wild swoop, a sharp sidewise turn — directly before them showed a second DH, and Swann opened up viciously. The other machine went to pieces in mid-air. Up shot Swann, up and around; the third enemy had taken warning, however, and had straightened out in desperate, frantic flight.

"Hey, buddy!" Swann turned tensed, excited features. "I can get him—"

"No—back down!" ordered Connor.

Swann obeyed.

When General Ng Fu, one bandaged arm in an improvised sling, stepped out onto solid earth again, he was greeted by a storm of cheers and wild yells; and with reason. He was the only one of China's war lord bandits who could boast of actual air-fighting, and had a scar to show for it. And Connor, leaving the plane, saw a thin old figure in black silk garments among a crowd of officers—Chang the venerable!

Half an hour later, Connor and Swann sat once more in headquarters, with the general and old Chang, sipping their tea.

Ng Fu had just torn up Connor's checks totaling fifty thousand dollars. When the general finished speaking, Connor turned with a grin to the aviator.

"Bert! He says you're offered a colonel's commission, five hundred gold a month, and the command of his air force. What say?"

"Done," said Swann delightedly.

"I'm to be his Tientsin agent—and he wants three more planes like yours. Also, he's buying yours. Five thousand cash. Suit you?"

"You bet."

Connor turned again to the general.

"He agrees, but must take me back to Tientsin in the morning, after his engine is overhauled. I'll go to work at once—you must avoid any further conflict with the Nationalists until I can get into touch with them. We'll throw you into their party."

Ng Fu chuckled.

"Yes, I think so myself," he rejoined. "Chiang Kai-shek cannot be beaten as a general. Nor can I match forces with him. But, allied with you and him and Chang Ti-shan, there is a chance—"

"For all of us," and old Chang's wrinkled features broke into a smile.

Connor wondered what they would say at the Tientsin Club—if they knew! But they never would.

THE END.

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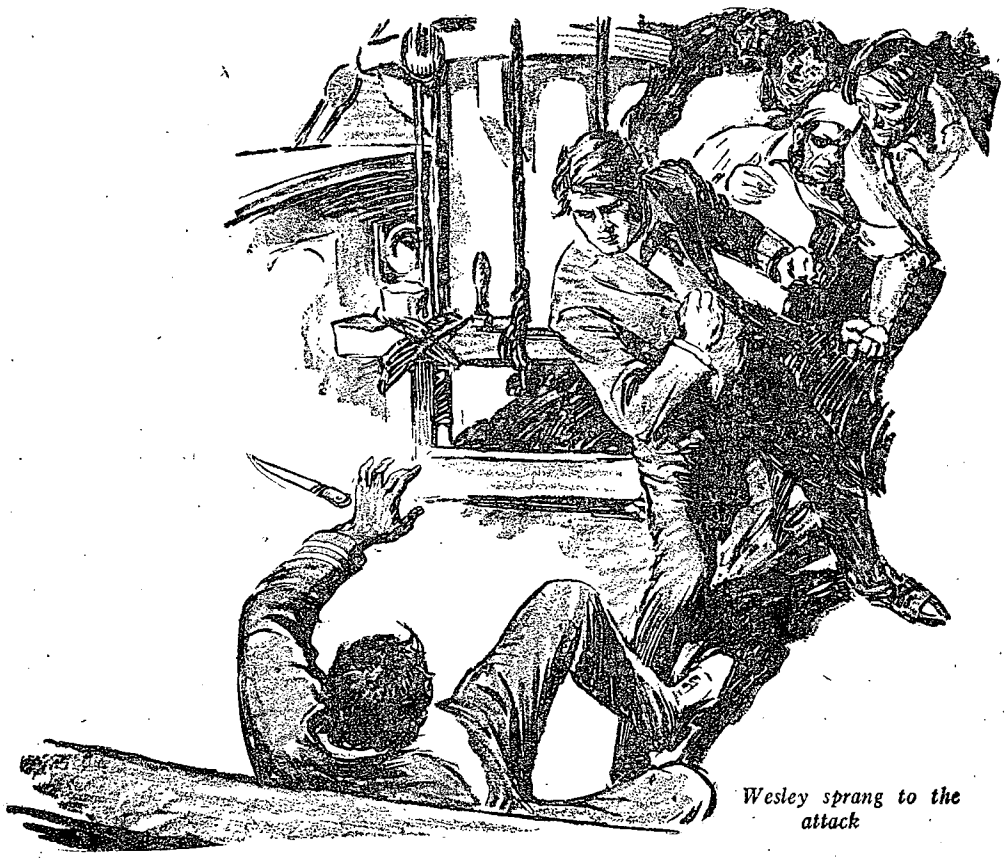

Wesley sprang to the attack

Whaling Blood

Shanghaied aboard his own whaling ship and then marooned on a desert island, Wesley Watson had yet to learn the full villainy of the men who conspired against him

By DON WATERS

Author of "The Spark of Life," "Winner Take All," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

ROUGHLY jerked from the life of carefree luxury he had been leading in New Bedford as the heir to the whaling ships under the blue house flag of the Watson line, young Wesley Watson awakes one morning to find himself shanghaied aboard the Anne Elizabeth, one of his own ships. It was but a few hours before that he had first learned that the Watson line was mysteriously losing money, and he had demanded an accounting from his agent, Amos Tumbrill, and his trustee, Abner Miller. He had been

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on his way to elope with Prudence Hathaway, whose father disapproved of Wesley's indolence.

When he protests to Captain Talbot (Tumbrill's cousin) and Silva, the mate, that he is Wesley Watson, he is jeered at, told he has signed on as William Williams, and put to work.

In the ensuing months, through strenuous toil and the life of a seafarer, he becomes a new person—strong, confident, clear-eyed and determined. He wins promotion to the dangerous task of boatsteerer, and makes two friends aboard the ship: Ben Earle, an old sailor, and Cortez Allen, another young boatsteerer, who teaches him navigation.

When the Anne Elizabeth rounds the Horn and heads up into the Pacific, many whales have been killed and much valuable oil has been taken aboard. And, known only to the captain and the mates, and to Wesley and Cortez, a large chunk of ambergris, worth many thousands of dollars, is in Captain Talbot's possession.

A landing party, under Silva, is sent ashore at a small island, ostensibly to capture turtles. Wesley wanders from the others, and returns to find the shore boat leaving without him. His cries are unheeded. Facing starvation, he attempts to swim out to the becalmed ship that night. He has almost made it when the vessel starts to make headway.

CHAPTER IX.

A GHOST RETURNS.

WESLEY was getting tired now. His arms felt as heavy as lead. His legs were so numb that he could scarce move them. A flare of hope ran through him. The ship was coming toward him. None of the officers aboard had noticed or heard his progress through the water, or else they could have laid her out on the other tack, and avoided him. A few more strokes and he was directly in her path, not fifty yards in front. He turned over on his back and rested.

Even as he did that, he heard an order shouted. They were coming about. The Anne Elizabeth would stand out on a long tack that would set her off shore. The jibs were snapping hard as she headed into the increasing wind. She forereached up to within a few yards of where Wesley floated on the water.

With all the energy he could command, Wesley threshed the water. He was almost spent. The last half dozen strokes were torture. They brought him underneath the bowsprit. As her head paid off, Wesley caught the bobstay chains, hooked his leg over them, and exhausted, breathing heavily from his exertions, he rested while a ripple of water curled up over the forefoot beside him, and bathed him in its spray.

For a quarter of an hour he sat in the chains, considering what move to make. Then he cautiously climbed up the slanting links, reached the bowsprit, slid inboard quietly. He hid beside the tryworks till the mate on watch passed the other side, then crouching over in the lee of the bulwarks he scurried aft down into the main cabin. Without knocking, he jerked open the door of Captain Talbot's quarters and entered the room.

The captain was leaning back in his armchair, his feet cocked up on the desk, a glass in his hand, an expression of vast complacency on his face. Seated in his chair canted back in a corner, his feet propped up on the rungs, Mr. Silva's broad smile changed to one of

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horrified amazement when Wesley came into the room.

The grim-faced young man did not need to ask what the two had been talking about. The expression on each countenance told the story. They had deliberately planned to leave him and were already celebrating the success of those plans. The open log book on the desk before the captain attracted Wesley's attention. He grabbed it up.

By the light of the sperm lamp on the bulkhead beside him, he read the last entry:

> William Williams, boatsteerer, deserted to-day. Strong gale and heavy sea made up, and was unable to send searching party ashore for him. Will return later and try to apprehend him.

A little square of cloth lay on the open book. It was the tag out of the clothes Wesley had worn that night so long ago when he had gone whistling up Pleasant Street, a bouquet of flowers in his hand. They had cut it out of his inside coat pocket to destroy all evidence of his identity, for on that white label were his name and address.

Wesley threw the book down on the table, stuck the label in his pocket, laughed scornfully. "So that was the way you had it all fixed, was it?"

Without waiting for an answer from the dumfounded pair, he turned, walked out of the cabin. Passing the bomb gun rack in the main cabin, he reached up, lifted down one of the heavy brass bomb guns, opened a locker below and took half a dozen of the brass bombs with him to his room, hiding them under his mattress.

KNOWING that the pair in the cabin aft would take some time to recover from their surprise, he crossed the main cabin to Mr. Silva's room. Down in the bottom of the mate's sea bag he found what he was certain would be there, his own clothes and shoes.

He lifted the lid on the mate's sea chest, tumbled the contents out on the floor, again found what he looked for. His own watch, a little wad of money—a hundred dollars; Mr. Silva had evidently appropriated these for himself and had made no mention of the valuables to Captain Talbot. It was easy to understand why the mate would offer no objections to getting rid of Wesley.

With a grim smile of satisfaction he carried his possessions back to his own cabin, locked the door, then fastened the knob to the foot of his berth with a piece of line. He'd see there'd be no accident happen to him while he slept if he could prevent it.

Sitting on the edge of his berth, he opened up the watch. His expression became abstracted, his eyes far seeing. Inside the cover was a picture, a painted miniature of Prudence Hathaway. It was a long, long road back to New Bedford.

It seemed untold ages since that night when he had blithely walked along the brick pathway under the elms on Pleasant Street. He'd lived a hard life since then, his very existence hanging on the strength of his arm and the quickness of his wits. He wondered what would happen before he again trod those quiet, tree shaded streets. There was not the slightest doubt in his mind that he would win through. But he knew that his life from now on must be one of constant vigilance.

He held the picture up to the port, where, in the reflected light from the bright stars above, it showed soft and mellow, half seen, a vision from another world. He closed the case,

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wrapped the watch and his money in a handkerchief, lifted up a loose board in the ceiling that he had discovered some time before, and slipped them into the hiding place.

As he lay down on his berth he murmured, "Aye, Prudence, I'll come back to you though all Hades should try to keep us apart."

That night passed without incident. Nor was there any untoward happening next day. Wesley went about the decks warily, stood his trick at the wheel, watching every move of Mr. Silva and the captain when they were around him.

When he was sent up aloft to reef, his vigilance was constant. It was his duty to get out on the yard-arms first and haul up on the reef cringles, a dangerous position high above the deck with nothing but the smooth, rounded surface of the yard to hold on to, and the swaying foot rope below to bear his weight.

The whole crew was aware of the attempt to maroon him. Luckily for Wesley, he was liked by them, or he never would have made it back to the ship.

For, when he had a chance to engage Ben in a quiet conversation, he learned that the sailor had been the one to place the light opposite a porthole in the forecastle.

"I knew that it was your one chance, to swim for the ship, lad, so I took the lamp down from its bracket on the mast and rigged it before the port."

Cortez Allen, too, had done his share in helping Wesley regain the vessel that night. Cortez had been at the wheel, and when the breeze sprang up he had headed the ship toward the island. It was a good ten minutes before Mr. Silva had come on deck and given orders to head the Anne Elizabeth offshore.

THE vessel worked out of the doldrums, caught the northeast trades, and with free sheets headed westward. Twice the boats lowered and picked up a couple of whales each time. Yet Wesley knew that all this was but incidental. The certainty hung over him that both the captain and the first mate now were more concerned about getting rid of him than of taking whales. He was sure they would not resort to open violence. What form their action would take he had no idea. There are so many accidents which could happen aboard a whaling ship, or during the chase, that Wesley knew his life hung on a slender thread and only by his own wits was he prolonging it day by day.

Apparently Captain Talbot was in a hurry to make to the westward. Contrary to the usual practice, the ship, instead of shortening sail at nightfall, carried all her canvas day and night, and never varied her course. Wesley and Cortez caught the sun several times, and learned from their sights that the ship was sailing on one parallel of latitude twenty north, scarce varying ten miles off of it from day to day.

"He's running down his westing," Cortez stated. "To my notion, we're heading for the Sandwich Islands, and Owhyhee, where he will take on wood and water and in all likelihood get shore liberty. Keep your wits about you, for it strikes me that they never intend to let you see the island."

Wesley was of the same opinion, too. Mr. Silva surely knew his stateroom had been entered, but he never mentioned that fact. Both Captain

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Talbot and the mate did not even address him directly. When Mr. Silva wanted him to do something, he relayed his orders through one of the other three mates.

One morning the lookouts raised a sail ahead. At the cry of "Sail ho!" all hands lined the rail and looked to the westward, where the skysails of a full rigged ship glowed rosy in the morning sunlight. She came up on them rapidly, a Yankee clipper under full sail.

Cortez, who stood by Wesley at the rail, remarked: "That flying beauty is probably just a day or so out from the Islands, and we are making for the same place."

Sail on sail, a towering mass of canvas lifted rapidly over the horizon. Her royals arose, her topgallants and topsails, and then her wide spreading courses. Hard on the wind, she drove toward them, a white lather of foam curling up on her cutwater, a streak of froth slanting off her bilges. Inside of an hour she came abreast. In the steady shove of the trade wind she cut through the waves hissing. She passed by a hundred yards off.

Captain Talbot grabbed his speaking trumpet, yelled: "What ship is that?"—then stuttered in confusion, red-faced, as a youthful-looking man crossed over to the lee side of the poop on the clipper and called back: "Go to blue blazes, you stinking blubber hunter!"

The crew of the clipper laughed loud at this. Wesley could see them slapping one another on the back as though they had heard a good joke. When the ship passed he saw her name on her stern, the Flying Cloud; her home port, New York. The Flying Cloud was soon hull down on the horizon astern, and inside an hour and a half even those skyscraping upper sails of hers had dropped below the rim of the sea to the eastward.

By contrast, for the rest of that day the Anne Elizabeth seemed to be but crawling across the sea, even although she was running almost dead before the trade wind, which by nightfall was blowing a half gale. For the first time since they had left Cape Horn they ran into dirty weather that night. The sun went down in a saffron sky. Above, it became overcast, then the clouds thickened. The moon was blotted from sight. The waves, running in long, regular windrows, grew higher, rushed hissing up astern on the Anne Elizabeth, and by midnight they were breaking in crashing phosphorescence.

WESLEY was on the watch from midnight till four in the morning. He tumbled out of his bunk, and when he came on deck he was met by a rush of water that had broken over the windward rail and piled across the decks to leeward. Hardly had he gotten out when Mr. Silva gave the orders to take in sail. Wesley went up the ratlines to the topgallant yard, lay out on the foot ropes, reached the tip of the yard. Another man who had followed him out made his way out to the other end of the spar. Below them the topgallant sail, wind pressed, was as tight as a drum head. There was a crash above them. A jagged streak of lightning zigzagged across the sky.

Looking below, Wesley saw no one following them up. They were alone on the topgallant yard. In that quick and transient illumination from the blue-green-yellow light he saw something else. Down below, at the pinrail, Mr. Silva stood with a line in his hand, his face upturned.

Wesley acted before he thought.

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With a shout to warn the other man, he swung himself in toward the mast. As he did he felt the yard give. He knew that the mate had cast off the sheet. Free now, the yard plunged back and forth in wild, uncontrolled swings.

A cry, frantic, fear filled, screamed above the shriek of the wind in the rigging. Wesley's companion had been torn from his hold and was even now falling to a certain death. No man out on the end of that yard could hold his grip. But Wesley knew that the other never would hit the deck. He'd hung on till the spar took up on the end of one of its wild swings, and then went hurtling out into the blackness of the night.

Wesley crouched beside the mast for a moment, then caught the lee backstay and slid rapidly down to the deck. No one saw him. He got a belaying pin out of the rack, crept over to where he had last seen Mr. Silva. Every muscle in his body was taut. He was raging mad clear through, ready to do murder. But Mr. Silva was not there. In the glare of another flash of lightning, Wesley caught a glimpse of him hurrying aft and dodging below.

For a few moments Wesley crouched in the shelter of the bulwarks, considering his next move. Suddenly an idea flashed into his mind. He dropped the belaying pin, hurried forward and went down into the forecastle.

CHAPTER X.

CONSPIRACY.

BEN was lying on his back in his bunk, snoring loudly when Wesley woke him up and told him what had just occurred. The older man raised up on his elbow, his mouth gaped in surprise.

"Aye, lad, I warned ye what to expect. They had made up their minds that ye should not be on board when they make port. They little care about sending another man to his doom, if ye went also. Yer plan is the only one that will save ye. Lay low here, and when we dock, get ashore without being seen. Ye may be able then to call on the law. The crew here are all on yer side. None will disclose the knowledge that ye are hidden below."

For two days Wesley stayed down in the forecastle, ate his meals with the rest of the foremast hands, and for two days the Anne Elizabeth forged to the westward. On the morning of the third day the lookouts above sighted land and at noon the Anne Elizabeth came to a mooring in the harbor of Honolulu.

Wesley, looking through the porthole in the forecastle, smelled the warm, moist air coming off the land. After months at sea, the scent of flowers and growing things was pleasant indeed to his salt stung nostrils. He saw a boat put off from the ship. Captain Talbot, dressed in his shore clothes, stood at the tiller. Wesley noticed a white canvas bag beside him when the boat went by close to the bow of the ship.

The young whaler's face grew thoughtful. He knew what was in that bag. It was the ambergris. Why should Captain Talbot take it ashore? Why was there so much secrecy about it? The crew, up to now, had not been notified regarding the lucky find. The suspicion grew strong in Wesley's mind that they would not be notified. This, evidently, was not scheduled to enter into their lay, or the proceeds from its sale to be divided among them.

Wesley watched the boat row up to

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the docks, saw the captain go ashore, carrying the bag with him. A step sounded overhead on the deck, and Wesley hurried up into the eyes, concealing himself in the dark, wedge-shaped corner forward by the stem of the vessel. He did not want to be seen by any of the officers. An idea had entered his mind that might explain why the Watson ships were making losing voyages. Perhaps Captain Talbot was sending that ambergris back without ever crediting the cruise with it.

The captain returned in a few hours, and all hands were called to lighter wood and water out to the vessel. They went at it with a will, for they had been promised that when this was done they would all get shore liberty. Crouched down in the forecastle, Wesley listened to the noise above as the casks of water were put on deck, and the loads of cordwood piled into the hold.

That afternoon the Anne Elizabeth was warped into the dock, the entire crew advanced a few dollars apiece and given shore liberty. With a stamping of sea boots and many a joyful shout they left the ship in a hurry. Even the boat-steerers went with them, followed a short distance behind by the second, third and fourth mates. A few minutes later the carpenter and the sailmaker went overside, and just at sundown the cook and his assistant hurried up the dock. Save for the captain and the first mate, Wesley was alone aboard the Anne Elizabeth.

DARKNESS fell. He was getting ready to slip ashore when he heard voices above, the sound of a hatch being lifted. Cautiously he crept up the ladder, looked out, saw a gang of stevedores on deck. They rigged a block and fall to the foreyard, and to Wesley's surprise hauled cask after cask of oil out of the hold, rolled them across the decks and onto the wharf.

Like a flash it came to Wesley. This was how the Watson ships were making unprofitable voyages! The oil was being set off of them, transferred to other ships and sent back home with no record made on the books of its transfer.

Wesley knew that Captain Talbot could not do this by himself. The oil would have to go to New Bedford to be sold. The men there who were supposed to be taking care of the Watson affairs would make no record of it on the company books. They would sell it, divide the proceeds among themselves. Captain Talbot would draw his share, and the Anne Elizabeth, like every other ship under the blue house flag, would report another voyage that scarce paid the cost of its making.

Just ahead of the Anne Elizabeth at the dock was a clipper ship. Wesley had seen it that morning, looking through the porthole in the forecastle as the Anne Elizabeth lay off the dock. He could not help but admire her clean, trim lines, her sharp stem and flaring bows. Her hull was painted red up to her black bulwarks. Her deck houses, the inside of her bulwarks and the forecastle head were a bright green. Her slim spars towered high above all the shipping in the harbor. She crossed three skysail yards that looked like broomsticks, so far above her deck did they stretch. Under her long bowsprit that steeved sharply upward, her figurehead, a gilded eagle with outstretched wings, seemed to hover before her.

Wesley saw the oil being stowed aboard her for the passage back to the

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States. It was after midnight before this was finished and Wesley found his chance to slip quietly from the forecastle and across the dark decks.

The ship seemed to be deserted. His bare feet made no noise as he went down into the main cabin. Quietly he opened the door off to his little stateroom, lifted the board in the ceiling, felt the roll of bills that he had concealed there.

He got his sea bag containing his clothes, and as noiselessly as a cat, changed to his good suit. Walking gingerly to the pinch of unaccustomed shoes, he went over the rail onto the dock. His intentions were to get in touch with the port authorities, lay the matter before them, and take action against the captain.

At the head of the dock he rounded a corner, gasped when he met Captain Talbot face to face. Under the glare of the street light, of the two, Captain Talbot showed the most surprise. His jaw dropped, his eyes widened in amazement, his face turned an ashy gray. He was like a man who had just seen a ghost.

For ten seconds the two stared at each other.

"What!" Captain Talbot spoke in a nervous voice that was almost a groan.

If he had any idea he was viewing the ghost of Wesley Watson, that soon changed when Wesley stepped toward him, doubled up his fist, and growled, "You miserable thief! I'll—"

But what he intended to do never materialized.

With a shriek of terror, Captain Talbot turned and ran down the docks toward where the two ships lay moored, one ahead of the other. Wesley watched him, saw that the captain did not go aboard the Anne Elizabeth, but scurried across the rail onto the clipper ship.

His first impulse was to follow, then he thought better of it. Suppose he should go aboard that ship, what good would it do him? He'd been shanghaied once, he would be shanghaied again. He had miraculously gotten this far alive. There was no use in tempting fate further. He stood for a few minutes, thinking over the matter, and then went rapidly up the street. He had decided to find the port authorities, and report the whole matter to them.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CHASE BEGINS.

JUST at daybreak Wesley came back down toward the docks. He had been unsuccessful in his attempts to locate any one in authority. If police were about town, he had seen none. Save for a few drunken sailors, and one Chinese who did not understand what Wesley was trying to tell him, he had found none else who could give him any information. Perhaps, later in the day, he might be able to do something, but now it was useless to try.

He passed by a house where the sound of music and revelry discordantly profaned the still morning air. Among the medley, he recognized Ben's voice. The crew of the Anne Elizabeth were making merry inside. He reached the docks, rounded the corner of a building. A ship was standing out with all sails set, rapidly moving away. He did not need to ask what ship it was.

It was the Flying Scud, that had laid in front of the Anne Elizabeth. Wesley ran quickly down along the dock, jumped aboard the whaler. No one

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challenged him. He went down the stairs in two leaps. The main cabin was empty, the door of the captain's quarters open. A couple of drawers had been pulled out of the locker, their contents dumped carelessly on the floor. Captain Talbot had jumped his own ship—had taken passage on the clipper.

Wesley sat down heavily in a chair. It had never entered his mind that the captain would desert. A couple of papers attracted his attention. He glanced at them. They were the clearances for the Anne Elizabeth. Seeing these, he knew that this action of the captain's had not been premeditated. Yesterday Captain Talbot had gotten the ship ready to continue her cruise, had put wood and water aboard, had attended to her clearance. Last night, his meeting with Wesley had changed all his plans.

Wesley hardly knew what to do now. There was no chance of catching that ship which had just left. He recalled overhearing some of the men telling that the Flying Scud was due to sail for San Francisco, and from there she would round the Horn, bound for home. She could outsail anything in the harbor. Yes, and Wesley knew there were few ships on the seven seas which could overtake her, once she had a fair start. Captain Talbot had taken the one sure way out of his dilemma. He had left in a hurry too, for his sextant was still in its case, his nautical volumes in their rack, and the chronometer ticked away in its little box cushioned with cotton wool.

FOR ten minutes, Wesley sat trying to puzzle out what his move would be, then he decided. Coming out of the captain's quarters, he looked into the staterooms off the main cabin. They were all empty save one. Mr. Silva lay stretched out on his bunk, his mouth open, snoring in a drunken sleep.

Tightly clenched in his hand he held a half-filled bottle. There was a grim smile on Wesley's face, a purposeful set to his shoulders, when he went up the dock.

An hour later, with the help of Ben and Cortez, he had rounded up most of the crew. Some could not be found, but their places were taken by a few sailors off the Flying Scud who had been left when their ship so suddenly took its departure. Wesley had given up all ideas of soliciting any help from the authorities. His best chance now was to handle this thing himself.

They got the crew down aboard the ship. The three mates were found too drunk to even know what was going on, and half dragged, half stumbling, were led aboard. The lines were cast off, the head of the Anne Elizabeth paid around to the set of the outgoing tide.

The soberest among the crew went aloft, loosed the gaskets. One by one the sails were shook out and set. The offshore wind filled the canvas and in an hour the Anne Elizabeth had settled down to her pace and was shouldering the bright blue Pacific rollers off either side of her blunt bow. Ben stood at the wheel; Wesley motioned to Cortez who came towards him, a smile on his face.

When the boatsteerer drew near, he said, "Aye, things are shaping up far better than I expected since I heard the news from Ben that you were safe, and hidden in the forecastle. What now do you plan? Whatever it is, rest assured you can depend on me."

Wesley thanked him, explained briefly what he had in mind, and asked

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him to find out if the sailmaker was yet sober. A voice behind him interrupted his conversation.

"Hey! What's dis? Whata you do? Where cap'n?"

Wesley turned around to where Mr. Silva stood, an expression of bewilderment on his face. The first mate was swaying unsteadily from side to side with the motion of the ship. One eye was half closed. He was stupid and befuddled. His gaze focused on Wesley. Surprise, consternation, swept across his countenance.

"You, youa!" he screamed. "Where youa come from? You, youa dead! I see youa fall!"

In terror, the mate backed across the deck till he took up against the bulwarks.

"Santa Maria!" he yelled. "What happen? The dead come alive!"

Eyes staring wide, the mate stood, a man paralyzed by stark fear. For a long minute he seemed incapable of motion, then in a trembling voice, he asked, "Where cap'n?"

When he heard that the captain had left, the mate began to curse. Wilder he shrieked his oaths and then, suddenly, he seemed to lose his reason. Screaming in a hysterical voice, he made a quick motion behind him, pulled out his sheath knife and leaped toward Wesley.

"Cap'n gone!" He slapped himself on the chest. "Me! Antone de Silva, me cap'n now! Get forward," he yelled to Wesley, threatening him with the knife. "Get forward, where you belonga!"

WESLEY'S eyes narrowed. He turned and glanced quickly to where the crew were gathered in the waist of the ship, watching him. Off to one side, the mates and the boatsteerers were bunched in a little group, plainly at a loss as to what was expected of them. He saw Ben coming forward with a heavy spike in his hand. Cortez had surreptitiously reached around behind him, and was working a pin out of the rack. Wesley could depend on those two, but what were three men against all the rest of the crew?

Things would happen soon, and happen to his disadvantage unless he made the first move. He made that move so suddenly none knew what he contemplated till it was done. With one quick step he cleared the distance between himself and the mate. His right arm swung in a short arc. He pivoted from the hips, threw his strength into that swing. With an audible *plop!* his fist landed square on the point of Antone de Silva's jaw. The mate went down in a heap as though he had been shot. His knife flew spinning through the air and splashed into the sea.

Without glancing at him, Wesley walked a few steps forward, held up his hand to silence the medley of cries and shouts that immediately greeted his action.

"Men," he said, "the captain has deserted. He has shipped several hundred barrels of oil by another vessel. He has in his possession thousands of dollars worth of ambergris. His intentions are to defraud us all of our shares of that. The ship he sails on is bound for California, and from there, home. I promise you this: If you will work with me, we have a chance of getting back before she does, and if we do, each man aboard will share, and share alike in the proceeds of the voyage. I will take no more for my part, than—" Wesley pointed to the cook's helper—"than he does."

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A murmur of approbation ran through his listeners. Wesley smiled to himself. He had the crew with him now.

But the boat-steerers and officers were viewing him doubtfully. While there was nothing out of the way when the officers struck a man, it was a serious breach of discipline for any of the crew to raise their hands to their superiors. Wesley knew that this action was being considered with scant favor by the mates. Regardless of the fact that Mr. Silva was armed and threatening him with a knife, Wesley knew that not only the law, but long established custom dictated that his only approved method of self defense lay in scurrying out of reach.

He stood in the shadow of the mainmast, tense, watchful. He had made up his mind that he would see this thing through, peacefully if possible.

But if it brought on a fight with the officers, he was ready for that. One way or the other, it was necessary to have their coöperation before he could make his plan a success. He was determined to gain their assent by peaceful means if possible, but if those failed he was ready to fight.

A savage exultation ran through him.

He recalled the first night when he had come aboard. In a measure, he had repaid that now. He was absolutely unafraid of the consequences of that blow he had just struck. His arms tingled.

The hot blood pounded in his head. With a quick side glance he measured the distance to where a heavy iron bar lay beside the pump. In a flash, he planned his moves if the mates should try to rush him. He'd stop them with that pump brake before they got well started. He nodded his head toward the mate lying on the deck.

"YOU little realize," he said. "That ambergris which Captain Talbot now has, not one of you would ever have gotten a penny from it."

He spoke directly to the second mate. "What is your lay? A thirty-second, you say." Wesley did a bit of rapid mental calculating. "Do you realize that your share of that ambergris amounts perhaps to as much as two hundred dollars? And that oil transshipped, do you men know that each of you were being cheated out of another hundred there? For I am certain that not one drop of that oil would ever be credited to the voyage. Captain Talbot, he would get his money, aye, and your money too, out of that!"

At this news the mates looked undecided. Heads together, talking in low whispers, the officers conferred for a few moments and then made their decision.

Angrily one exclaimed: "He's a thief! The cap'n made monkeys of us all!" He held out his hand to Wesley. "We go with you."

"Very good," Wesley replied. "Now, let's get all the sail on her that she will drag, and we'll put right for the Horn and home."

At this a cheer rang out from the crew. Wesley breathed a sigh of relief and turned his attention to Mr. Silva, who was beginning to stir.

He motioned to a couple of boat-steerers. "Help this man below," he said.

They came up eagerly, and Wesley noticed that they did not handle the mate any too gently. They just seemed to have come to the realization that Mr. Silva had been a party to defraud-

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ing them out of their share of the proceeds of the voyage. They were taking this opportunity to relieve their feelings.

They grabbed hold of his arms, dragged him across the deck and bumped him down the stairs. They bundled him through the door of his stateroom and tossed him unceremoniously upon his bunk. Wesley followed them down, locked the door. Thus far his plan was working out well. Up on deck again, he mustered the crew, promoted Cortez to fourth mate, stepped the other mates up one in their rating, and brought old Ben forward from the forecastle to take the berth of boat-steerer.

After dinner he called for the sailmaker, got him down into the cabin, and talked with him. There was plenty of canvas aboard, and the sailmaker fell in readily with the plan of working it up into kites to try and speed the Anne Elizabeth on her way home.

The Flying Scud and Captain Talbot were well started toward San Francisco. How long she would lay there, discharging and taking on cargo and passengers, Wesley did not know. But each day that she lay over was that much to his advantage. When she left port she would have to make the long run to the south'ard that would take in the length of a continent and a half before she doubled the Horn and reached up toward home. She was a far faster ship than the Anne Elizabeth, and yet, as the days passed, the whaler began to show an amazing turn of speed.

The carpenter worked up stunsail booms. The sailmaker cut the canvas, and every man who could handle a palm and needle sat tailor fashion on the deck and sewed. First one, then another of the flying kites was rigged, bent onto the yards, and in the drive of the trades filled and added their part to the progress of the ship.

ACROSS the northeast trades the Anne Elizabeth edged her way. When they hit the equatorial calms their luck held good, for just three days afterward the old ship heeled over to the steady shove of the southeast winds, and with a bone in her teeth, the rumble of water along her bilges and a clean wake astern, she drove down toward bleak, desolate Tierra del Fuego and Cape Horn.

From the equator to fifty south, the Anne Elizabeth made the run in two weeks. From fifty south in the Pacific around the Horn, under shortened sail with a heavy gale from the westward throwing the long, gray Cape Horn rollers at her square stern, she made the run to fifty south in the Atlantic in ten days. Winter was coming on around Cape Horn, and all hands were jubilant at the quick passage out of that region of fierce, screaming snow squalls, overcast skies and thunderous gales.

Wesley knew that if the Flying Scud were well on her way down toward the Horn, it would be a close race of it home. For the clipper ships at that time had a record of ninety days for the run from San Francisco around to Sandy Hook. If luck stayed with the Anne Elizabeth—that thought was on every one's mind. But their luck failed them on the run up to the equator in the South Atlantic.

Day after day, the Anne Elizabeth rolled in an oily calm, swinging aimlessly in the current, or spent precious hours standing across the wind, trying to beat ahead against light and variable breezes. They were six weeks in passing through the doldrums, six weeks

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that tested the temper of every one on board. By slow degrees they worked across the equator and a great shout went up when the true trade wind was met.

By this time the ship was a maze of sails and rigging. Every available yard carried its area of canvas, watersails and catchalls; staysails between the fore and main, and a ringtail on the spanker aft. The carpenter and sailmaker had even rigged skysails aloft to fill in the bare royal poles. For several consecutive days, after running into the northeast trades, the Anne Elizabeth had all the wind she could carry. Oftentimes Ben looked at Wesley with a troubled face, and glanced aloft to where the spars strained and bent with the press of sail they were carrying.

One day when Wesley took his usual midday sight, he figured his run from the noon previous, and could hardly believe his figures. The Anne Elizabeth had logged 270 long sea miles in twenty-four hours. He stood her as far to the westward as she would go in order to get a good slant in the westerly variables which he knew they would soon meet, and to receive all the benefit possible from the northerly drift of the Gulf Stream as they angled across it. In latitude thirty north, the ship, to a wild shout of joy from all on board, was headed on a course direct for home.

The Anne Elizabeth was a far different vessel homeward bound than she had been on the way out. Not only had the ship been practically rerigged, but conditions on board for the crew had also changed. It was the old story that men working willingly perform more and better work than they do when they are driven to it. Once, during a calm, whales were sighted, and the afterguard were considerably surprised when several of the men expressed the desire to lower and chase them.

The men worked with a will, oftentimes anticipating an order, and doing something before they had been asked to. There was none of the sullen discontent that was so apparent while Captain Talbot was master. Nor was there reason for it. One of the first things Wesley had done was to give orders to the cook that what the afterguard had for their meals, the crew would have also. The high good spirit which that order had engendered was still noticed by him each time the mess boy carried the crew's meals forward.

CHAPTER XII.

A MURDEROUS ATTACK.

THEY were homeward bound, and no sign that the Flying Scud had yet passed them. That very afternoon, however, one of the men at the masthead raised a shout that caused consternation to all on board.

"Sail ho!" the cry rang out. "Dead astern, and coming up fast!"

Something in the man's tone caused Wesley to start suddenly. He ran down into the cabin, got out the brass telescope, tucked it into his belt and hand over hand went rapidly up the ratlines to the rings on the mainmast. It needed no second look for him to see that it was a clipper. She was a good distance astern of them, hull down on the horizon. The sun was setting. It would be dark before she overtook them, for a "stern chase is a long chase."

He watched until the gathering darkness blotted out that towering pile of canvas from his sight, then, with a worried frown on his face, came down

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to the deck. If that ship were the Flying Scud, there was not one chance in a hundred of getting home before her. She would log three knots to his two, even with all the brave spread of canvas that the Anne Elizabeth was lugging. For she, the product of a master mind, was built sharp and slim, sparred and rigged for speed, and no bluff-bowed vessel like the Anne Elizabeth could hope to keep her in sight under equal conditions.

As Wesley went toward his quarters, he saw Antone de Silva sitting in one of the boats. Antone had heard the lookout, and when Wesley passed him Silva favored him with a malevolent grin. Antone, who had been confined to his room for the first month, was not liberated. He alone of all on board was sullen and untalkative, sitting for long hours in one of the boats, his chin cupped in his hand, gazing moodily out over the sea. He got no pleasure out of the quick progress of the Anne Elizabeth. Once she got home, he would have to answer some ugly charges with but small chance of clearing himself from them.

Wesley, up to then engrossed in making a quick passage, had not paid much attention to the disrated mate. That night, however, he learned that Silva was not to be ignored.

WESLEY was standing beside the mizzenmast, gazing aloft to where the mast heads swung slowly round and round against the background of the sky. Over and over again, he asked himself the question: "What ship is that we sighted this evening?"

He tried to comfort himself with the thought they were now in the regular ships' lane, and the vessel might have been any of a dozen American clippers, homeward bound. Yet that brought him small consolation. There was a familiar look to her rig, her sails cut narrow and tall, a breath-taking height to where her royals crossed the masts, that once seen, was not readily forgotten. A premonition hung heavy over him that the Flying Scud was the ship he had sighted. If it were, she had probably slipped past now in the darkness, ghosting quietly by with never a sound to betray her.

It was a quiet night with the sails barely sleeping, a light wind flowing from the southeast. The helmsman leaned on the wheel, lazily cutting the spokes first one way, then the other, to hold the ship on her course. The ocean slowly heaved up and down like some monster breathing, and save for the quiet little rustle of the wind sliding off the lee edge of the canvas on the spanker, and the half heard gurgle of water slipping under the run, the night was still and hushed.

Suddenly that hush and Wesley's reverie were broken by a low, throaty curse, followed by a wicked swish through the air. Involuntarily Wesley dodged.

With a ringing thud, a keen knife stuck, vibrating in the mizzenmast not six inches from his head. He fancied a shadow blended into the darkness under the gallows frame. He leaped toward it, but save for the man at the wheel behind him, nodding, he saw no one.

For a second, he stood considering. Then he went down into the cabin. It was close below, and the doors to the mates' quarters were all open. Wesley stepped into the first one, caught the limp wrist of the second mate, felt his pulse. Slowly, regularly, it throbbed under his finger. The third mate was served the same way.

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He crossed over to Silva's room. Stretched full length out on his berth, Silva lay with his mouth open, snoring loudly. Wesley stood watching him for a few moments, then he reached down, caught the other's wrist in his hand. He smiled to himself as he felt the involuntary muscular twitch when he grasped it. His smile deepened when the quick, erratic throb tingled his finger ends. Wesley dropped the hand, removed the key from the inside of the door, snapped it locked from the other side, and again Silva was a prisoner. Wesley was taking no chances of having another knife thrown at him.

His eyes flashed, his fists clenched when he thought of the men who had sent him out on this voyage. He'd reckon with them, and in no gentle manner.

Silva, the poor dupe, was but a tool whom they used in their attempt on his life and happiness.

Then he thought of some one else, blue eyed, soft and alluring—Prudence Hathaway. His manner changed. The hard lines on his face melted, and in spite of himself a mistiness obscured his sight, a lump formed in his throat.

HE went back up on deck again, and told Cortez, who had the watch, to keep a close lookout and notify him if he saw the lights of any passing vessel, adding, "Silva just threw a knife at me. I've locked him in his room."

Cortez started at this. "I've said all along you were too lenient with him. Give me the word and I'll go down and clamp the bracelets and leg irons on him."

"No," Wesley answered. "Poor devil, he has enough on him now without that. I often wished that he, too, had gone on the Flying Scud, and relieved me of the necessity of bringing him back a prisoner."

Cortez, however, was all for putting the mate in irons. "He'll vent his spleen on you yet, first chance, mark my words," was the warning.

But Wesley merely laughed as he turned and went below to his cabin.

As he pulled off his shoes preparatory to turning in he glanced at the mercury barometer screwed to the bulkhead. He could hardly believe what he saw. The mercury was down to 29.80, its concave surface showing that it was still falling in the glass. Evidently it had gone down rapidly, for a few hours before when he had glanced at it, all had appeared to be normal.

He hurried upon deck again, cast a look overhead. Even as he gazed above he saw the stars being slowly blotted out as though by a drawn curtain. A cool puff of wind struck his cheek. Off to the eastward, low down on the horizon, a jagged streak of lightning zigzagged across the sky. He wasted no time. A storm was coming.

He called to Cortez. "Get her under reefed tops'ls as quick as you can!" he ordered.

A few moments later shouts and commands rang over the ship. The wind increased in force. A pelting rain drove down. But the crew who had tumbled half dressed out of their berths had gotten the sails snugged down just in time.

With a roar, out of the blackness a torrent of wind struck the Anne Elizabeth. She heeled down till it seemed she was on her beam ends. There was a rattle and a bang of loose objects sliding across the slanting decks. In the glare from a flash of near-by lightning, Wesley could see the men hanging on to the pinrails, crouched

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behind the bulwarks. Still farther down the ship pressed.

Wesley ran back to the man at the wheel. With hands and feet on the spokes, together they rolled it. The ship sluggishly answered her helm. There was a loud abrupt *pop* like gunfire from above. A topsail had blown clean out of its bolt ropes. Relieved, the Anne Elizabeth slowly came up to an even keel.

It had been a narrow escape, the sudden squall that came with so little warning. Only the promptness of every man aboard had kept her from turning turtle. A squall was merely a forerunner of a heavy gale. The wind hauled around from the southeast to the eastward, and under bare poles the Anne Elizabeth drove before it in wild lunges.

It was late that night before Wesley turned in. His sperm oil lamp was burning very low, just a feeble glow of flame, but tired, his clothes soaking wet, he did not take the trouble to trim it. He tumbled into his berth and, worried by the events of the day, he found it hard to go to sleep.

SOME time later he awoke suddenly from a fitful nap, ears strained. Tense, every nerve on edge, he listened. His lamp was almost out, just a feeble little blob of light, but dimly illuminating the room. On deck above he could hear the thump and swish of water, the mournful moan of the wind shrieking, and close beside him the complaining creaks and groans of the ship as she labored in heavy weather.

But he knew these things had not awakened him. There was something else. A faint rustle and the creak of a loose board in the floor turned him tense and rigid. His eyes, staring into the gloom of the cabin, made out a formless shadow that slowly crept nearer to him. The faint glint of the light reflected for a flashing instant, dancing off some bright, polished metallic object.

With an instinctive motion of hip and shoulder that preceded the thought which willed it, Wesley twisted himself, rolled out of his berth. As he did, an abrupt, crashing roar reverberated through the cabin. A lurid red tongue of flame, five feet long, swept across the room. On top of it, so close that the two sounds could scarce be separated, came a ripping, tearing crash, the riving splintering sound of broken wood, the screaming tinkle of falling glass as the skylight above caved in.

So close was that streak of flame Wesley could feel the heat of it on his face and smell the scorched tang of burned hair. A bomb gun had been discharged at him at close range. He leaped up, felt the slipping grasp of a garment in his hand, heard the thud of footsteps across the main cabin and on the companion stairs.

Following close behind, he got on deck in time to see a figure of a man leap to the bulwarks, stand poised on the rail for a moment, and then heard the loud yell above the noise of the storm. He jumped toward the place. There was no one there. He knew then that Antone de Silva had settled his own case out of court.

To the excited questions of the officers who, at the sound of the explosion, had tumbled half dressed out of their bunks, he told them briefly what had happened. Every one agreed that Antone de Silva had chosen his own method of settling his troubles, and they were helpless to prevent it and reluctant about making any effort to rescue him.

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Once back down in his quarters, Wesley got a lamp from the main cabin, looked at the big brass bomb gun lying on the floor, saw his berth wrecked, torn to pieces where the bomb had struck it. A thick layer of feathers covered everything in the cabin where the mattress had been ripped to shreds liberating them.

An examination of the room where Silva had been confined disclosed the lock neatly cut out from the door, a pile of shavings and a sheath knife showing how the imprisoned man had hewed diligently at the tough white oak of the panel.

Wesley spread a torn blanket down on the locker in his own quarters, lay down, and tried to sleep. Silva was soon forgotten, but the recollection of those tall spars and white squares of canvas astern, seen in the fading sunset, kept him awake.

CHAPTER XIII.

A RECKONING.

WHEN the silvery gray of dawn began to show against the skylight above, Wesley put on his shoes, got his telescope and went out on deck. The gale of last night had subsided, and a fair working breeze was blowing this morning. The mate on watch had the Anne Elizabeth under full sail again. Wesley noticed they had even bent on a new topsail to take the place of the one blown away last night.

He climbed up to the rings and focused the glass, but it was not yet light enough for him to see any distance. Not till the sun shoved a thin red sliver of fire over the far rim of the eastern horizon did visibility increase.

Eagerly Wesley swung his glass to port and starboard, in a half circle that encompassed the horizon in front. There was no sign of a ship ahead of him.

Undoubtedly the clipper, behind last night, was far in front this morning. He looked astern. A gasp of astonishment escaped him. Clearly outlined in a bright patch of sunlight he made out a ship. She was a good eight or ten miles off. He focused the glass on her. He could scarce hold it steady. He caught the glisten of the morning sunlight on a gilded figurehead, saw a brilliant red hull, topped by a black stripe of bulwarks, saw the green glint of deck-house, saw something else that made him gasp again. Like a gull with a broken wing, the Flying Scud, for it could be no other, trailed half her foremost, angling down over her rail.

Wesley gazed intently. Not alone the foremast, but the mainmast too was broken. It had snapped off at the topgallant cap. On her mizzen, now bereft of its royal pole, he could barely make out little flutters of cloth where the sails had been blown from their bolt ropes. His first thought was that out of decency, and through the dictates of common humanity, there was nothing else for him to do but change his course, sail down on her and offer assistance.

He studied the ship astern for a full five minutes. He could see the black dots of men up on her yards. Evidently she had been caught in that squall last night, and suffered severely. It was quite as evident that she was in no great distress, or else the crew would not be aloft working in her rigging. The ensign fluttered bravely in the breeze. The Flying Scud was crippled, but not vanquished.

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Wesley knew if he should bear down on her and proffer help, he probably would be soundly cursed for his temerity. The captain and mates aboard that ship considered themselves competent to cope with almost any emergency. They would look upon it as an insult for a blubber hunter, whose kind they so despised, to aid them. Wesley was just as pleased; he had no intention of being insulted himself. His judgment was backed by the afterguard when he informed them of what he had seen. At the breakfast table that morning every one was in high spirits. There was no doubt in their minds but what they stood some chance now of beating the clipper home. It would take her several days to set a jury rig, and with any sort of breeze at all the Anne Elizabeth would be far enough ahead to keep the lead on her.

Cortez voiced what each man was thinking: "Here's hoping," he said fervently, "that we're not becalmed now. If the wind should die, they'll get her patched up some way, and with even half of her full canvas drawing we'd have the devil's own time keeping before her."

LATER in the afternoon, when Wesley went up again, he could still see the ship astern, and barely make out that she was carrying her courses and topsails. Apparently, being so near home, her master had decided not to attempt to refit at sea. Wesley smiled to himself. From this, he surmised that Captain Talbot had not recognized the Anne Elizabeth, if he had seen her. No man at that distance would call the Anne Elizabeth—with all her kites set, with stunsails rigged, with catchalls and watersails spread—no man would guess her to be a whaler.

All that day with a steady wind the Anne Elizabeth logged her twelve knots. By noon the ship astern was just a faint streak low down on the horizon. But by nightfall Wesley, who had gone aloft again, was worried to see, right in his wake almost, the upper sails of a vessel poking above the skyline. The Flying Scud, crippled as she was, was not to be so easily outrun. As soon as her crew got more canvas on her, she would give them a close race.

That evening the wind increased in force, and all through the night the Anne Elizabeth drove steadily along over a moderate sea, with a fair wind across her quarter. Next morning Long Island lay off the port beam. The white squares of canvas that could still be seen from the mast heads showed the Flying Scud was holding her own. The wind lightened and all that day the ship astern kept about the same distance after them. At midnight, looking through his glasses, Wesley made out the lights ashore that showed where Providence lay. At daybreak, when he came on deck and started up the rigging, he did not have far to climb when he saw the Flying Scud slowly overhauling them.

The sailmaker came to him, touched his cap and said, "Cap'n, unless we make a move, sir, yon ship is going to pass us. I'm of the opinion that she is making for New Bedford, the same as we are making for New Bedford to unload that oil, and unless we do something, she'll go up the river ahead of us."

Wesley nodded gloomily. "Without a doubt, you're right." He threw out his hands in an impatient gesture. "But what more can we do?"

The sailmaker answered: "I've been considering it ever since we first sighted

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her, and I've been doing a bit of figuring on my own. We've been working down in the steerage, a couple of men and myself. We have taken our extra spanker, sewed a spare jib onto the head and made of it a ballooner. Give the word, and we will bend it on. It will add a knot to our speed, but—" and the sailmaker paused, "it's a risk."

"Our spars are carrying a heavy strain now. A sudden puff, and they might go. What say you?"

Wesley nodded. "Haul it up," he said briefly. "We'll risk it."

Before an hour had passed, the Anne Elizabeth boasted another sail, one seldom before seen on a whaler, a big ungainly jib topsail that filled, swelled, bellied out. A cast of the log, after it had been bent on, showed that it was doing its work in driving the old bark toward home.

AT seven o'clock in the morning the Anne Elizabeth passed Cuttyhunk Island, and with a fair wind, her home port almost in sight, stood across towards the mainland. Right behind her another ship with red hull and black bulwarks was sailing fast towards the same port. A couple of miles from shore the Anne Elizabeth was met by the pilot schooner. The topsails were backed, the ship's way barely checked till the schooner came alongside. With a flying leap the pilot caught the lanyards, swung himself over the rail.

With curious eyes, he gazed aloft at the yardarms where the stunsails were rigged, looked at the big ballooner forward. He surveyed upward to the newly painted royal spars. He turned, gazed astern to where, well down on the horizon, another ship was approaching.

"You seem to be having a little race, cap'n," he said in a tone of admiration. "You're carrying some canvas on the old girl. But," he gazed aft again, "if that's the craft you sail against, you got a good hour on her, unless," he looked doubtfully above, "unless something cracks up aloft."

Wesley looked up anxiously. "It's a chance I take," he said. "It's a chance, and a matter of pride with me. I want to carry everything right up the river."

The pilot nodded. "A sporting wager, eh?" he asked.

Wesley shook his head. "No, indeed," he replied. "A grim, hard business, this. Even now the outcome is in doubt, for if those astern recognize this ship, perhaps all our trouble will be in vain."

The pilot laughed. "Recognize her!" he exclaimed. "Why, man, I've known the Anne Elizabeth for over a decade now, yet when I saw her approach this morning, save for her davits, I would have wagered ten to one against any man's money that she was a clipper out of Boston or New York."

He turned and pointed to where, angling down toward them, a fleet of small boats, hauled close on the wind, approached. "I don't suppose you'll wait for them."

The bumboats, the boarding house agents, the crimps and the outfitters who met every incoming ship were seen approaching. A half dozen small sailboats bore down on the Anne Elizabeth. But the old bark was sailing bravely along at a ten knot clip, too fast for them to close with her and come aboard her.

Wesley, the day previous, had told all hands that their share of the voyage would not come to them till after he had intercepted Captain Talbot, if they

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reached port first. He added that he would pay each man in person, and would not recognize shipping crimps' or boarding house runners' orders. He smiled grimly to himself when the shouting, jovial crowd of men who had tried to come aboard, all avid to ensnare the sailors with their blandishments, yelled impotently at the speeding ship. He laughed outright as one, more bold than the others, sailed straight at the Anne Elizabeth, tried to make a flying leap for her chain plates, missed, and fell with a splash into the sea.

BUT he had little thought for them. He was coming home, home to the girl he loved. The Anne Elizabeth, on the breast of the flood tide, with a fair wind astern of her and all canvas drawing, shoved gayly up the river.

When the chimneys and church steeples of the town came into sight, Wesley went below, got out the blue swallow-tail house flag, bent it onto the halyards and hauled it aloft to the main truck high above the deck.

A thrill of pride ran through him when he gazed at that piece of bunting rippling in the wind. His flag, and his father's flag before him. He'd set it there, to let all the world see that a Watson ship was coming home. Let those astern sight that if they would. It was too late now for Captain Talbot to escape.

By mid morning the anchor splashed overboard. The sails were snugged in a harbor furl, and the crew, singing lustily: "It's time for us to leave her, leave her, Johnny, leave!" made ready to go ashore.

Wesley, too, was anxious to get ashore. When the customs officials and port doctors had cleared the Anne Elizabeth, he went with them in the customs boat, leaving the mates to dock the ship. As usual when a vessel came in, a big crowd was waiting on the wharf.

While he was being rowed ashore, he surveyed the dock closely and saw what he expected to see. Abner Miller and Amos Tumbrill stood apart, talking earnestly together. Wesley leaped up on the dock ten feet away from them. So intent were they in their conversation that they did not notice him.

He heard Abner speaking. "I do not like the looks of it. She has not yet been out a year. She is light in the water. She came up the river with more sail on her than was necessary or prudent. I wish Captain Talbot would come ashore, and let us know what is wrong."

Wesley stepped up to them. With his hands on his hips, he surveyed them scornfully.

"Captain Talbot will be here soon," he said. "May I have the pleasure of informing you that I am taking his place now?"

They recognized him then.

"Wesley!" Abner gasped. "How came you here?"

On each face opposite him Wesley saw a red flush of mortification creep. Abner's eyes were almost popping out of his head. Amos's jaw hung open in amazement.

"How came I here?" Wesley grated. "You miserable scoundrels!"

His eyes were flashing, his fists clenched.

With a quick motion he reached out, grabbed one in either hand by their shirt fronts.

Then, with an audible *plop* he knocked their heads together, released his grasp, and, when they turned, he

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planted a hard boot on each trouser-seat.

He grinned when, with wild leaps, yelling as they ran, the two men raced up the dock as though the devil pursued, to the astonishment of the crowd on the wharf who readily made way for them.

Miller, the pious Abner, a man who had led a sedentary life for years, showed an amazing turn of speed. His beaver hat, which had miraculously stayed on his head till then, now flew high as he dusted first one ear, then the other with his knees. He reached the corner and, like a bird, swept around it and disappeared, followed by his companion.

WESLEY'S anger cooled. He glanced over the crowd, saw no sign of the one person he looked for. He walked up the wharf through a lane of curious spectators, crossed the head of the dock and strode rapidly up to Pleasant Street. At the break in the hedge before his home he met John Hathaway.

"Wesley!" Hathaway exclaimed, surprise and pleasure in his voice. "Tell me how you left, and what happened while you were gone."

Wesley shook his head. "I have not the time now. I have but a few minutes before I must go down to the docks.

"I have brought the Anne Elizabeth back, pushed her hard all the way from the Islands of the Pacific. I will tell you about that later."

John Hathaway was quick to catch the meaning behind those words. "That was your ship I saw from the roof, your ship coming back. A bonnie sight she made, indeed. I've never seen so much canvas spread on a whaling vessel for many a long year, not since the days of Tom Watson, who had a record for lugging sail. I have just come down from the widow's walk atop the house. Another ship is coming in, and by the looks of her she has lost some of her spars."

Wesley nodded grimly. "Would you come with me down to the docks? Captain Talbot will soon be in on that ship. I would confront him when he steps ashore."

John Hathaway shook Wesley's hand warmly. "I knew you'd come back. We suspected what had occurred. Prudence—"

Wesley interrupted him. "And where, where is Prudence?"

He glanced up on the porch. Through the open door a girl appeared. A sun glint was on her head, a rosy flush of joy lit up her face.

Her voice was tremulous, vibrant with pent-up emotions when she called, "Wesley! Oh, Wesley."

She ran towards him, and Wesley clasped her tightly. She threw her arms about his neck, and sobbing in happiness, cried: "It's been a long, weary wait till you came back to me again."

A little gleam entered Wesley's eyes. Looking over the top of Prudence's head, he asked the question of her father. "What say you, John Hathaway? Have we your permission now?"

John Hathaway nodded slowly, pointed to where the skysail yards of the Anne Elizabeth showed above the buildings down at the water's edge. He smiled a little sadly. "Aye," he said, "although that is but a formality. The Watsons were ever men to take what they wanted, and again a Watson sails under the blue house flag."

THE END.

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Her rounded limbs were sprawled in a curiously distorted posture

Murder for Fun

It was begun for amusement, that fashionable game of "Murder," but it was to have a more startling outcome than even Dapper Dick Carleton, the district attorney, anticipated

By NORMAN H. WHITE, Jr.

THE voices of the women became fainter as they passed down the long hall. Grace Bryant's light laugh echoed gayly above the others. In the soft candlelight of the oak-paneled dining room the group of men settled themselves comfortably behind their cigars and liqueurs. A well-fed, well-groomed lot they were.

Donald Partridge, whose name in gilt letters adorned the doors of brokerage offices in at least seven American and one European city, surreptitiously undid the top button of his black satin waistcoat and sighed heavily. He turned to his politely smiling host. "Don't know when I've enjoyed a dinner so much, Black—too good! Tough on a man who's trying to lose weight!

"It's good," continued the broker relaxing in his high-backed chair, "to realize there are such women as Mrs. Black in the world. All the newspapers talk about are such people as that notorious Gloria Booth—why, even after she's been murdered they can't

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seem to run enough stories about her. Say, by the way, Carleton, you're handling that case, aren't you?"

The tall, lean man who was slouched indolently opposite Partridge nodded as his keen dark eyes appraisingly swept the group.

No one knew how Richard Carleton, or "Dapper Dick" as he was known to every one, from the big flat-foot who had the slaughter house beat to red-headed Captain McGinnis of headquarters, had ever found time both to make his brilliant record as district attorney and to keep up his contact with the circle of society which was his birthright.

"Yes, I'm handling the Booth case personally." Carleton paused and reflectively surveyed the white ash on the end of his cigar.

Partridge rattled on. "You know I met her once—forget where and when. She knew a lot of nice people, didn't she, Carleton?—though she certainly had what even her best friends must have admitted was a colorful personality!" The fat broker chuckled meaningly, his broad face like that of a mischievous Buddha. He hooked a stubby thumb at William Nelson, president of the company whose name adorned the white-enamelled electrical ice box humming smoothly in the butler's pantry.

"Take Bill, here, he knew La Booth! Can't fool me, Bill—I know you did. Saw you with Gloria Booth on the Riviera two years ago—just remembered it—when your good wife thought you were in Paris on a business trip—selling refrigerators! Huh! You weren't dealing with anything as cold as that!"

William Nelson's bright eyes blinked behind his *pince nez*. He adjusted his black bow tie somewhat nervously as he cast a sidelong glance at Carleton. He cleared his throat with some difficulty before speaking.

"Yes, I must admit that I'd met Miss Booth," he finally croaked. His Bermuda tan seemed to have curiously lost its healthy quality.

Partridge looked round the table and winked. "Met her! Heck, I'd say you met her! Gloria Booth was a good one for an ice box manufacturer to know! Ha, ha!"

"But I haven't seen her for at least two and a half years," continued Nelson, addressing Carleton anxiously after glaring at Partridge for an instant. "Not for two and a half years, I promise you!"

Dapper Dick smiled. "That is the report we have, Mr. Nelson," he said quietly.

The manufacturer of ice boxes drew a deep breath and his clean-shaven face was again a healthy brown. "You know it's all right, Partridge, to say that Gloria—I mean Miss Booth," he corrected himself quickly, "was a colorful character, whatever that means, but she was really a wonderful woman." He seemed to speak defensively.

"SHE knew quite a surprising number of people in our circle," laughed Partridge annoyingly. "Say, come to think of it," he swung toward the man on his right whose cherubic pink features and gold-rimmed spectacles belied the super-fashionable cut of his dinner jacket and the perfect gardenia glowing whitely in his buttonhole, "Holmes, here, had the pleasure of La Belle Gloria's company for dinner at the Ritz—while Mrs. Holmes was—let me see—where was Edna at the time—Palm Beach, wasn't she, Jackson?"

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Jackson Holmes's normally pink face suddenly became apoplectic. He swallowed quickly, his small red mouth framing words which for a second he could not utter. Then, his glance veered toward Dapper Dick Carleton. "That was all of two years ago," he spluttered defensively, "two years, my dear Carleton, not a day later!"

Dick Carleton smiled as he put his liqueur glass down on the table. "Don't be nervous, my dear Mr. Holmes," he said. "You are perfectly correct. Two years ago last week Saturday, you took Miss Booth to the Ritz for dinner. Then, let me see, you went to the Silver Accordion night club for the evening."

Jackson Holmes subsided limply into his chair. "My word!" he muttered, obviously relieved, "I certainly need your services for the Holmes Statistical Bureau, Mr. Carleton—I'll give you our New York office at your own salary!"

"In my business facts are necessary features, Mr. Holmes," said Carleton. "I remember the exact date because Gloria Booth went out with me the following evening!"

"It was a sad thing, Mr. Carleton—that murder," pursued Jackson Holmes, his composure regained. "I do not think that the sensational newspaper stories regarding Gloria Booth can be warranted. Myself—I found her somewhat cold." Jackson Holmes looked complacently about the table. Carleton's thin lips set tightly. Pompous little fool, he thought. He hadn't been able to make any headway with Gloria, but wanted to give the impression of being a man of the world.

Donald Partridge grunted wisely as he winked at Carleton. "I'll bet a plugged nickel to a box of golf balls, Jackson, that Mrs. Holmes didn't know that you ever knew the notorious La Belle Booth!"

"God forbid!" said Jackson Holmes quite piously.

Dapper Dick Carleton gazed into the lambent emerald green crème de menthe in the slender liqueur glass before speaking. "Gloria Booth was a colorful, unconventional, passionate creature," he said softly. "Laws meant nothing to her—she lived and loved—and three weeks ago to-night she was murdered. I mean to find her murderer!" He raised his dark sardonic eyes slowly from his glass and searched the faces of the well-groomed men sitting about the room almost challengingly.

One of the younger of the group of seven, Joe Aldrich, whose pleasing manner made him an enviable income in the brokerage business, inclined his head as Carleton's eyes stopped on his clean-cut features.

"I knew Gloria," he said as if answering Carleton's unspoken question. "She was very wonderful." He continued in a low voice: "Though under the circumstances I wouldn't care to have my name brought into this—unless it's necessary."

"Don't worry, Joe," Carleton said smilingly, "your lovely new wife will never know that you knew the lady. You only took her to the St. Rex grill twice last summer and your conduct on both those evenings was most exemplary."

Joe Aldrich's pleasant face showed his astonishment. "You're right, but I'll be damned how you knew!"

Dapper Dick smiled the small twisted smile for which he was famous. "Statistics again, Joe," he said. "Now that makes five of us out of the seven who knew Gloria," he continued as if talking to himself. "Poor Gloria! Black

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here, I take it," he looked questioningly at his host, "together with Dr. MacKenzie, did not have the pleasure of her acquaintance."

"Apparently not," Black smiled apologetically. "At least, I can speak for myself."

"And surely for me, also," boomed the deep voice of Dr. Malcolm MacKenzie. "Though from her pictures I certainly missed knowin' a beauteous bit of womanhood."

James Black, smooth, poised, known as the perfect host, smiled kindly at his fidgeting guests. "Shall we join the ladies?" he inquired with a reassuring nod.

"Better to call him the perfect hostess," Carleton thought annoyedly as he followed the others out. "He's too damned charming."

"NOW," said Mrs. Black as they entered the great drawing-room, "Miss Bryant has just suggested a lovely game! I'm sure it will take you sober men away from your thoughts of business!"

"It's really lots of fun," said Grace Bryant apologetically. She was Dr. MacKenzie's niece from Albany who was visiting her uncle. Demure and with pretty, regular features, soft yellow hair and a slender, rounded figure, the gorgeous crimson-ruffled dress with its daring décolleté seemed too sophisticated for her personality.

"Don't let's play any games that will harm that lovely Booth model you are wearing to-night, my dear," laughed Mrs. Black.

Dapper Dick stared curiously—almost rudely—at the girl as if seeing her for the first time. "A Booth model?" he said sharply. "I suppose when Gloria Booth's golden voice is forgotten her name will live on for her talent as a designer of women's clothes and as a breaker of happy homes." He spoke almost bitterly.

Grace Bryant's pretty face suddenly sobered. "I didn't think—oh, dear!" she cried. "You're working on that horrible case, aren't you, Mr. Carleton?"

"And I never realized it, either," Mrs. MacKenzie groaned in a low voice to Mrs. Jackson Holmes. "Grace bought that dress only to-day."

"You look as lovely as La Booth herself would have looked," Dapper Dick was saying, his sharp eyes smiling into the girl's. "I can pay you no higher compliment."

"But now I'm sure you won't want to play the game I'd suggested," said Grace Bryant somewhat hopelessly.

"And why not, Miss Bryant?" inquired James Black with his most sugary smile.

"Because," said Grace, looking at Carleton, "it's the game of Murder!"

"On the contrary," cut in Carleton almost eagerly, "I'm forced to take murder so seriously most of the time that I'd really enjoy playing Murder for fun."

"Well, then," said Grace doubtfully, "if you're really sure you'd like to play it, here's how it's done. One person is the district attorney, and the rest of the people all secretly draw cards from a hat. The person who draws the ace of spades is the murderer. He's the only one who can lie. Of course, no one knows who draws the fatal card!"

"Naturally not," said Carleton, laughing at her naïveté. "There'd be no game if the murderer were known in advance."

"Then," went on Grace excitedly, her clear gray eyes sparkling, "the district attorney leaves the room and

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the lights are all put out. The people move around in the dark until the person who drew the ace of spades seizes some one by the throat. That person counts ten and then screams and falls down. The ten counts are to give the murderer a chance to get away from the spot. Then the district attorney turns on the lights and questions everybody. The murderer is the only one who is allowed to tell a lie about what he's been doing. All the rest of the people must tell nothing but the truth and must help the district attorney to solve the problem."

CARLETON spoke up "I'll be the district attorney," he laughed, "but I warn you that I'm going to be very stern."

Mrs. Black smiled. "I think it sounds perfectly wonderful," she said eagerly. "I haven't been so excited for years."

"How about playing in the music room, Mrs. Black?" suggested Carleton. "I can wait out in the hall as long as I must be the hard-boiled district attorney, and the music room is larger."

"I think that's a very good suggestion," agreed Mrs. Black.

"I'll fix the cards," said Carleton. He selected a group from the pack Mrs. Black had handed him. "There is the fatal ace of spades," he said with a smile, holding up the card which for centuries has been the grim omen of death. "We want to be sure to have that among the fourteen." Shuffling them expertly, he turned his back to the group in order to place them face downward in the hat. Then he turned around.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen," he said, "if you'll draw your card!"

In the far corner of the music room stood a huge, shiny grand piano. Soft, tan-covered couches in the modern style ran along the wall on either side. The side lamps on the severe white-metal wall brackets were controlled by a switch near the door.

Laughingly Grace Bryant seized Carleton's arm and escorted him into the hall. "Now, Mr. District Attorney, you must wait out there," she commanded. "When you hear the murdered victim scream, you snap on the lights at once. Then you can come in and show us how good a district attorney you are."

From the darkness of the great music room came subdued squeals and excited gasps as the guests bumped into one another in the darkness. The seconds ticked on. In the dimly lighted hallway Dapper Dick smoked his cigarette and waited tensely for the scream which might mean so much or so little. It was taking longer than he had expected and he shifted his lean legs irritably.

A full minute had gone by. From the darkened room he heard the light laughter of the slim girl in the Booth dress. His thoughts flashed back to the tragic scene of three weeks ago—to the crumpled, slender figure of Gloria Booth, clad in a crimson-ruffled dress identical with that which the girl who called herself Helen Bryant was now wearing. His mind recalled vividly the glossy, impassive shining piano that had loomed black as a sepulcher above the limp spot of color on the floor that had been the body of Gloria Booth, who had lived, had loved, and just three weeks ago had been murdered.

For a second Dapper Dick Carleton closed his narrow eyes tightly as if to shut out the scene his memory had painted. When he opened them again

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two heavy figures were standing quietly at the end of the hallway facing him. Silently Carleton indicated with a slight gesture of his hand that the men should remain where they were for the moment.

THEN it came. It cut the silence of the quiet house as a chef's knife cuts through jelly. That voice was Helen Bryant's! Dapper Dick's normally thin lips became suddenly drawn back like a knife scar across his lean face. The look of the trained man-hunter transformed him from an indolent, graceful gentleman into a thing of steel and purpose. Before the echoes of the girl's shriek had died against the heavy, luxurious hangings of the long hallway, he had sprung lithely through the door. A quick movement of his hand. The switch snapped and light flooded the room.

"Keep your places, every one!" he cried. "Let's play this game properly. Remember that I am the district attorney! I will want to question one and all of you." He stood at ease, quickly making a mental picture of the different locations of the guests.

On the floor by the black, glossy, grand piano lay the crumpled, crimson-clad, be-ruffled figure of Helen Bryant in her beautiful Booth dress. Her rounded limbs were sprawled in a curiously distorted posture. One edge of the dress had been lifted by her fall and a graceful ankle and slender leg were boldly displayed. Above the sheer chiffon stocking a narrow circle of soft flesh gleamed smoothly white against the brilliant crimson dress.

Mrs. MacKenzie noticed, said sharply in a low, worried voice: "Helen—your dress, my dear!"

The limp figure did not move. Mrs. MacKenzie stooped to adjust the hem, but Dapper Dick's voice stopped her abruptly.

"Don't touch the body, Mrs. MacKenzie, if you please!" There was an authoritative ring in his tone that made the sweet-faced woman draw back in dismay.

"But—" she protested weakly.

"Sorry—no one may touch the body until after the examination," interrupted Dapper Dick, his face grim.

James Black stood gazing as if he'd never seen a girl's ankle before. His deep-set eyes burned so intensely that Mrs. MacKenzie moved to one side in order to put her stout body between her host and that of her niece. Jackson Holmes looked furtively at his wife and then switched his glance appreciatively to the girl on the floor.

"Please stand where you were, Mrs. MacKenzie!" said Carleton abruptly. Uncomfortably, the doctor's wife moved to her original position. "Now," said Carleton quickly, regarding Mrs. Black, "I'm going to interview you first. Just where were you when this fiendish and most atrocious murder of this beautiful young woman took place? Remember please everybody—" His voice was imperative "— in this game only the person who drew the ace of spades is entitled to tell any untruths!"

"Oh, I'll tell the truth—I was right where I am now," said Mrs. Black with a nervous smile. "I didn't dare move an inch. I was really afraid in here in the dark. Please, can't we tell Miss Bryant to get up now, Mr. District Attorney? She looks so like a real corpse that she terrifies me every time I glance at her! The poor dear looks so uncomfortable there on the floor!" Mrs. Black glanced over at Mrs. MacKenzie who nodded in agreement.

Carleton shook his head. "I imagine that Miss Bryant must know the rules

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of the game," he said smoothly. "If she was supposed to get up she would do so. As it is we must compliment her on playing a most excellent part as the corpse."

If Grace Bryant heard the remark her limp figure gave no indication of it. Carleton stared at her closely for a brief moment, suppressed a start, then continued his examination. He turned his sharp, hard gaze on Donald Partridge.

"NOW, Mr. Partridge, the truth and nothing but the truth, unless you happened to draw the fatal ace of spades— Where were you when Miss Bryant screamed?"

"I was near the piano—not more than six feet from the spot where the body lies," said the broker with an infectious chuckle. "Gosh, I jumped as if I'd been murdered myself when that scream rang out! It was infernally realistic!"

"You mean that you were scared and moved over to where you now are standing as quick as you could?" questioned Carleton.

Partridge nodded. "Right!" he said. The broad smile on his pudgy face indicated he was enjoying the situation.

"Did you see any one near the place where the body is lying—any one that you could recognize?"

The broker hesitated for a second and then nodded.

"Who was the person?" pursued Carleton.

"I'm pretty sure it was our host," he replied confidently. "And I thought that he moved over from the place of the murder at the same time that I did. Then when the lights came on, here he was!"

Carleton smiled twistedly at Black. "Pretty conclusive evidence, mine host —unless friend Partridge is doing a little lying and is the murderer himself! How about it, Mr. Black? Were you near the scene of the crime or is the recent testimony of the witness to be disregarded as biased?"

James Black took his eyes off the form on the floor with an effort. "I wasn't near the piano," he answered. "In fact I came from the other side of the room just before the girl screamed. Partridge must have mistaken me for some one else."

Carleton peered at him. "This gets interesting—right away two witnesses do not agree."

He turned to Mrs. MacKenzie, whose eyes kept returning anxiously to the disarranged dress of her niece. "Mrs. MacKenzie, were you anywhere near the spot where the body now lies?"

"I was just this side—about six feet from where I am now."

"Did you see any one come from the exact place where the crime was committed? And, if you did, who was it to the best of your belief?"

"I saw a man with a wrist-watch on his left wrist—I think it was his left—at any rate I'm sure that I saw the luminous dial of a watch pass me in the dark!"

"Just a minute, Mr. Partridge, what are you doing? Let go of your left wrist!" Carleton had noticed the broker's right hand cautiously encircling his left wrist.

"That's all right, Mr. District Attorney," chuckled Partridge, "I had just forgotten whether or not I had on my wrist watch. You see, I seldom wear it with a dinner jacket—I haven't got it on!" He raised his hand to prove the point.

"Well, you might have just taken it off," said Carleton skeptically.

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"Stand where you are." He turned his attention to Jackson Holmes. He had to speak twice before the dapper, pink-cheeked man heard him.

"Jackson—what's the matter—can't you hear?" said Mrs. Jackson Holmes in exasperation to her husband who was staring entranced at the vision on the floor.

"Eh, what, m'dear?" he said. Then he realized that Carleton had been speaking to him and smiled foolishly. "Nice game this—didn't want to play but think it's a lot of fun, y'know, now we're into it. Did you want me, Mr. District Attorney?"

Mrs. Holmes made a sound like a snort and glared at her spouse.

"Where were you when the late Miss Bryant screamed?" demanded Carleton.

"I was right there," said Holmes, eagerly pointing out a place near the front of the piano. "And I'm positive that I saw some one with a wrist watch on move hurriedly away from the place of the murder just after the scream!"

"I will now ask all the gentlemen to pull up their sleeves slightly so that I may find who among you is wearing a wrist watch with a luminous dial—evidence is now corroborative on at least that point! Mr. Black—your hands, please." Carleton's manner was effectively business-like.

No watch was to be seen on Black's lean hairy wrists.

THEN Carleton slipped the left cuff higher up. A small gold wrist watch with a luminous dial was revealed as far up on Black's arm as the wearer could push it.

"Well, well," grinned Carleton, "I should say that the damning net of circumstantial evidence was drawing tightly about you, Mr. Black."

"I didn't say I didn't have a wrist watch, did I?" demanded his host petulantly. "How about looking at Donald Partridge's wrists—he usually wears a wrist watch!"

"Sure, I do," chuckled Partridge with great good humor, an expansive smile deeply creasing his features, "but I haven't got it on to-night! I guess Carleton has got you hooked, Black—you must have drawn the ace of spades, the way you've been fibbing."

With an obvious effort James Black brought a smile to his face. He did not speak.

Dapper Dick Carleton glanced steadily around the circle. He had inspected the other men's wrists, but Black was the only one in the group wearing a watch.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Carleton, "I now think I am ready to denounce the murderer of the beautiful young lady whose body lies near the piano."

At his words Mrs. Jackson Holmes uttered a little squeal of terror. "My gracious," she said with a nervous laugh, "but you sound too business-like for words—I'm scared to death—I feel as if a real murder had been committed!"

"Before I denounce this man to you," Carleton went on swiftly, "I'll recite briefly the evidence against him. You may all be the judges in this case. To begin with, Mrs. MacKenzie saw a man with a wrist watch on near the murdered woman—secondly, Mr. Partridge also saw the telltale watch, and finally we have Mr. Jackson Holmes who likewise placed the wearer of a wrist watch alongside the murdered girl just when she screamed. Remember that only the one who drew the ace of spades is entitled to lie.

"Mr. Black," Carleton turned al-

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most savagely on his host and pointed a long, thin forefinger at him. "I denounce you as the murderer of this girl! Now then, am I right or not?" Carleton turned with an intent and sternly serious expression to the rest of the guests as he waited for Black's answer.

To every one's surprise James Black quivered as if he had been struck with a lash. "I did not murder Miss Bryant!" His usually suave voice shrilled strangely. "I tell you I wasn't anywhere near her!" A shudder ran through him as he gazed at the still form.

"Why, Jim Black," said his wife reproachfully, "this is only a game! Of course, you murdered Miss Bryant. Three people saw you right over there at the time."

"Damn it," her young husband said angrily, "I tell you I didn't do it! I know it's only a game, but—" his voice quavered harshly, "but somehow I don't like it!"

Carleton glanced curiously at Dr. MacKenzie. The latter immediately walked across the room and leaned over to offer Grace Bryant a hand to lift her to her feet. The still figure did not move. A hoarse cry suddenly broke from the Scotchman's bearded lips. "Good Lord!" he said heavily, "The puir bairn's really murdered! Look!"

The color drained from the cheeks of his listeners as their horrified eyes followed the direction of his pointing finger.

Round the shining silk-clad form clothed in vivid crimson had spread a deeper circle of red. Under the swelling curve of the rounded left breast of the girl lying on the floor—a budding curve that the sophistry of the costume designed by the late Gloria Booth accentuated cunningly—was a ruddy, glistening pool.

CARLETON was paying little attention to the scene that awed and terrified the other guests. It was as if he had known this for some time. His keen eyes were fastened intently on the thin, dark face of James Black. For ten seconds not a person moved. Then Black's thin face began to twitch. His bloodless lips fluttered loosely and yet no sound came forth. His thin hands were clenched claw-like at his sides. As Carleton watched him he turned his sleek, dark head toward the door. There was no one between him and the hall. He swung suddenly toward the opening, but Carleton was between him and the doorway in one cat-like step.

"Where are you going, Mr. Black?" he said quietly, his eyes burning into the fearful ones of his host.

"Why, to call the police," stuttered Black. His whole form seemed to be trembling.

"You don't need the police," said Carleton sharply. "I represent the law."

"Carleton's right," cut in Joe Aldrich. "Let's keep the police out of this as long as we can. We're all in this horrible thing together now—three people have identified you as the murderer in the game, and now that it's real"—Joe Aldrich shuddered—"I don't see but what their testimony against you is just as strong as it was in the game we were playing!"

Black's face was livid with rage. "I tell you I'll call the police if I want to, Carleton," he shrilled. He was rigid with anger.

"Don't you let him leave the room, Carleton. Aldrich is right." It was Donald Partridge who spoke. His flat,

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usually cheerful face was carved in grim lines. "We're all in this up to our necks. When we were playing that darn foolish game I was sure it was Black and I'm just as sure now! He must have done it!"

"You see, Mr. Black."—Dapper Dick Carleton spread his sinewy hands with a deprecatory gesture—"I'm powerless. These witnesses saw you near the girl. But what I don't understand, Mr. Black," Carleton's voice was suddenly ominous and his thin face set in stern lines, "what I don't understand is, *why you lied.*" As he spoke, Carleton pulled a card from his inside pocket. His voice rose as he held the card toward the guests who stared at it with startled eyes. "There was no ace of spades in that hat, Black! No one had a right to lie, but *you* lied. Three witnesses caught you lying. *Why?*"

With a panther-like leap, Black, his face livid with fear and rage, had sprung past him to the door.

"You're not going to railroad me, Carleton! I didn't kill this girl!" His voice was shrill and high. "Damn you, I can see it now. The whole thing was just a frame-up! The piano—the dress—everything the same! But I didn't do it!"

"Stand to one side," commanded Carleton sharply. Black had succeeded in pulling the two sides of the door together and stood in the narrow crack.

His thin face, a mask of demoniac fury, peered through the narrow aperture of mahogany. "Pretty clever, Carleton! But you can't pin this on me!" he challenged, his thin mouth drawn down into an ugly sneer.

Donald Partridge advanced to a position near the closing door with a lightness that belied his bulk. "You convict yourself, Black!" he cried. "Don't be a damn fool. You can't get away—you'll get caught sooner or later. There's a chance you didn't do this—let's talk it over!"

BLACK laughed harshly, almost hysterically, from his safe position just behind the door. "I know I didn't do it, Partridge, but that isn't what Carleton's got in mind. I'm leaving—and don't any one try to stop me! Ask him why he didn't put the handkerchief beside the body of the girl? Then the picture would have been complete! There was a handkerchief in the other case."

"What other case?" demanded Carleton. He stepped two paces nearer the door rapidly. At his movement Black's right hand shot under his left arm-pit with the speed of a striking cobra. It flashed out, holding an ominous blue automatic levelled at the district attorney.

"What other case?" Black laughed as he repeated the question. His dark eyes rolled wildly. "Damn you, Carleton, you know—the same dress—the same position—even the piano! But you forgot the handkerchief." He laughed again uncontrollably. The blue automatic was pointing directly at Carleton's chest. "I know why you forgot it! You never saw it—no one saw it but me. And I picked it up. I've got it here—here!" His left hand clutched his coat convulsively.

Dapper Dick Carleton whistled a soft, low note as of surprise as he stood frozen. "So you've got Gloria Booth's handkerchief?" he said in an incredulous voice.

"Yes, damn you, I've got it! Now you know, don't you, Mr. District Attorney?"

Carleton's voice rang out sharply. "I know you killed Gloria Booth!"

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Black laughed hoarsely as his wife sank silently to the floor in a faint at Carleton's words.

"What if I did? Lot of good it will do you, you man-hunter—for I'm going to send you to Hades with the knowledge!" His voice rose to a shriek. He steadied his shaking right hand with his left and took careful aim at Carleton's tall figure.

Carleton faced him without moving a muscle. The silence was electrical. From the back of the room came Holmes's voice, husky and shaken:

"God, Black, you can't do this!"

Startled eyes saw Black's quivering hand suddenly become steady. They saw the slow pull of the tightening tendons of his trigger finger. Then the shot cracked with an ugly noise that was quickly smothered against the elaborate velvet hangings of the room. The twisted face in the door had suddenly disappeared.

Sounds of a terrific struggle came in from the hall. Then there was silence again.

"Got him, McCarty?" asked Carleton, walking toward the door.

He openly wiped his forehead with a white handkerchief which according to his habit he then carefully folded up before returning to his pocket.

"I want all you people to wait," said the district attorney grimly as he stepped out into the hallway.

"Jeez, Mr. Carleton," panted the older of the two men who had James Black in charge, "yuh let him go an awful long time. Tim an' me was hardly able to get to him in time after yuh whistled."

Carleton smiled. "I thought the bird would never spill, McCarty. I didn't like waiting so long myself—"

"But what if we'd slipped on a rug or somethin' after you whistled—he'd 'a' had yuh sure. Yuh oughtn't to take such chances!"

CARLETON turned back to the still amazed group. Dr. MacKenzie had left the body of Grace Bryant and was bending compassionately over the wife of the murderer. Silently the physician, aided by his own wife, helped the stricken woman from the room.

"Now, I guess some explanations are in order," said Dapper Dick as he thoughtfully watched Mrs. Black leave the room. "First of all, Miss Bryant, you may sit up!"

The slight crimson figure stirred. The girl sat up and calmly faced the astonished eyes of the guests.

"Well, I'll be damned!" ejaculated Donald Partridge distinctly. His wide mouth slowly curled into a smile.

"Meet Miss Helen Waterman, of my office," said Carleton quietly. "She deserves all our compliments on her clever work! Sorry to ruin that new dress, but perhaps I can get the State to buy you another."

"I don't mind the dress—I'd like to get this horrible red stain off me—ugh!" The girl shivered.

"Always the woman!" smiled Dapper Dick. Then he continued: "Dr. MacKenzie was also in on the deal, though his good wife was not—luckily Mrs. MacKenzie had never seen her husband's niece from Albany. Now, we have all known that James Black was a fortune hunter. He married our gracious hostess against the advice of her lawyer and her family—solely for her money, which he spent freely. A month ago he returned from Paris with a new car."

Joe Aldrich nodded. "It was a very special Renault—it must have cost him a lot of money!"

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"Not him—Mrs. Black footed the bills," corrected Carleton. "This young husband of hers could do no wrong. She adored him. That new car had French tires of a very unusual tread. Prints showing that same tread were found in the driveway of Gloria Booth's residence the morning after the murder. That brought Black under suspicion. I began looking up his record. I found that he had been secretly infatuated with La Booth. I planned either to trick him into confessing or to clear him in my mind. Dr. MacKenzie fixed up this dinner."

Carleton went on smoothly. "Casually questioned over our coffee after dinner, Black definitely denied knowing La Booth."

"Of course, no one could be expected to admit knowing such a creature," snorted Mrs. Jackson Holmes.

"The rest was all staged. Miss Waterman waited until Black was near her—"

"How did you get Black to pretend to pick out Miss Waterman in the murder game? If he'd taken some one else your plans would have all gone askew," Donald Partridge interrupted.

"Black didn't pick her out—Miss Waterman picked him out!" laughed Carleton. "I carefully held out the ace of spades so none of you would have any reason to commit the murder or to lie afterward. She simply waited beside the piano till Black came by in the dark and then screamed and placed herself on the floor in the identical position in which Booth's body was found.

"No one had any right to tell a lie, yet Black was so shaken at the sight of our reconstruction of the *real* murder scene that he lost his head and did lie—three of you caught him at it! Then, on my signal, Dr. MacKenzie suddenly announced that Miss Waterman was really dead! The strain was too much for Black's nerves! We all know the rest. To-morrow," he concluded, "I will want you all at my office to sign a deposition that you heard James Black confess to the murder of Gloria Booth!"

DAPPER DICK CARLETON looked over at the slight figure reclining wearily in the corner of his roadster as they drove back toward town.

"Tired, my dear?" he said softly to Helen Waterman.

"Very," said the girl evenly. "I keep thinking about that poor Mrs. Black."

Dapper Dick nodded absently. "I know it's tough," he said quietly, "but I try not to think about her. I think about some one else."

"I know," returned the girl quickly, "you're thinking about Gloria Booth."

There was a moment's pause.

"Did she mean so much to you?"

Then Dick said grimly, "No. I stopped thinking about her a number of years ago—except in a professional way. I was thinking—"

Determinedly he stared at the road ahead. "Those other people weren't the only ones who were frightened to-night when the lights went on and you were lying on the floor. I—well, I knew you weren't dead, but the mere thought of it—" He saw her eyes suddenly begin to mist.

"I might as well make a confession myself," he said softly, and there was no trace of the district attorney about him, "and I'll need the use of both arms to do it. You see—" But it seemed that she did see, and for once Dapper Dick was speechless.

THE END.

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He grasped viciously at the reins

Double Cross Ranch

It was as a private agent of justice that Jim Bland had sought out the unscrupulous Wetherell; now, facing a stranger's gun, he saw the play being taken away from him

By CHARLES ALDEN SELTZER

Author of "Man-Hunt," "Gone North," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

JIM BLAND TEMPLETON, avenger of wrongs, finds himself in an exceedingly interesting, but equally awkward position. Setting out to get justice for his friend Farnsworth, he has come up from his larger ranch in another part of Arizona to his Cross-in-a-Box outfit, where he is known only to Teasdale, his foreman. Adjoining this ranch is the Double Cross outfit, owned by the unscrupulous Wetherell who, in the East, had despoiled the Addison estate. Mary Addison is now Farnsworth's wife, and Templeton is determined that Wetherell shall make restitution.

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Wetherell, known as a cattle rustler, falls into a trap set by Teasdale, but is rescued from it by Templeton for the sake of Della, Wetherell's daughter, who does not know her father's true nature. To show his gratitude, Wetherell hires Templeton, known to him as Jim Bland, as foreman of the Double Cross. Working from the inside, Jim Bland's hopes to accomplish his purpose the quicker.

Della, believing Jim Bland to be a rustler who is corrupting her father, hates him determinedly, or tries to make herself think she does, even after he saves her from outlaws.

Jim Bland finds he has two friends at the Double Cross—Jeff Lefingwell and Shorty Quillan, who have been planted there by Teasdale; and one mortal enemy, Punditt, the straw boss, who has been paying attentions to Della.

When Wetherell is again caught rustling Cross-in-a-Box heifers, Teasdale gives him the choice of being hung or paying twenty-five thousand dollars for the stock—twenty thousand dollars more than it cost. Wetherell pays ten thousand dollars and gives a note for fifteen thousand dollars. He and Jim Bland ride to the near-by town of Lazette, where Wetherell draws the fifteen thousand dollars. As they pause for water on their way back they hear a voice behind them commanding them to elevate their hands.

CHAPTER XIX.

A ROBBER IS ROBBED.

BLAND held the coffee pot poised with its edge at his lips. He froze in that position, not even turning his head.

Wetherell likewise obeyed the command. He was still kneeling at the edge of the little stream, and he had been watching Bland drink. He did not move.

There was a silence, which was broken by the sound of footsteps upon the rocky floor of the gorge. Then Wetherell turned his head slightly to see a tall, masked man standing behind him. In the man's right hand was a six-shooter, which was held level and rigid at his right hip.

Wetherell's body jerked convulsively with apprehension as he felt his gun leave its holster, but his muscles became rigid again when he heard the man's voice, close to the back of his neck, mocking him.

"You've got notions, eh?" laughed the man. "It's him, boys—the jasper that was shootin' off his mouth about the fifteen thousand that he was goin' to draw out of the bank. Keep your eyes on him while I find the poke."

Wetherell had watched with sidelong glances while the man had removed Bland's gun, and now he shivered slightly as the man's hands went into a pocket of his trousers and was withdrawn gripping the huge roll of bills. The man laughed. He stepped back, and spoke.

"That's all, gents. We'll be leavin' you. I'll drop your guns up at the head of the slope, on a level. You can wait ten minutes and then go up and get them. We're leavin' one man up there somewhere to see that you don't try to grab the guns before the ten minutes is up. That's all, I reckon."

Wetherell heard the men retreat down the gorge. There were several of them. He looked at Bland, and observed that Bland was now finishing his drinking. He listened, and he could still faintly hear footsteps. But he did not turn, or move, for he had

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been convinced that to do so would be foolhardy.

Bland, however, deliberately held the coffee pot out to Wetherell. The latter, still on his knees, was cursing furiously and did not offer to accept it. So Bland set it down, wiped his lips with his handkerchief, lit a cigarette and walked to where his horse had strayed. He stood leaning against the saddle, one arm thrown around the pommel, and watched Wetherell.

Wetherell had got up and was now standing, facing the way the masked robbers had gone, shaking his fists at them. He was still cursing, and the gorge resounded with his blasphemies.

Bland, silently watching him, observed that he made no effort to leave the gorge, and it was Bland himself who made the first movement. He mounted and rode up the slope to the level, and began to search for the two weapons that the masked robber had said he would leave there.

Wetherell followed him, and also searched for the weapons, but not with the calmness and deliberation that Bland exhibited. Wetherell rode around, wildly, beating his horse and raging. Bland paid little attention to him. He rode eastward a little distance, and when after a while Wetherell grew calmer Bland pointed out several sets of hoof tracks in the sand, that led south by east through the hills.

"I reckon this is the way they went," he said. "They were after the fifteen thousand, and they got it, I reckon. Now what in blazes are you going to do about paying Teasdale?"

WETHERELL was disgusted. He raged around the level, spurring his horse about in a frenzied attempt to discover which way the robbers had gone. More calmly, Bland pursued his investigations. Finally, at the southern end of a narrow pass in the hills, he found a place where the hoof tracks of the horses of the robber band were clear and distinct, and with a lighted match he inspected them.

There had been four of the robbers, and when Wetherell was given this information he appeared less eager to attempt to pursue them. He glared into the southern darkness.

"I was hoping there was only a couple of them," he said. "Then we might have had a chance of squaring things with them, if we could have caught them. But four! There's no use. They'd waylay us and fill us full of lead." He cursed steadily for some minutes and then relapsed into a sullen silence.

Obviously it was one thing for Wetherell to rob others, but it was still another thing for others to rob Wetherell, and Bland wondered if Wetherell had ever considered the feelings of those whose property he had appropriated. He was almost certain that Wetherell's powers of imagination were not sufficient to permit him to realize that his victims might feel as he now felt.

He could not see Wetherell's face. Nor could Wetherell see his, and so he indulged in a delighted smile.

When Wetherell had exhausted his vocabulary of picturesque profanity he said gruffly:

"Well, come on! There's no use staying here all night. They've got the money, and I suppose by this time they're heading back to town or to wherever they came from."

"And Teasdale isn't any nearer being paid than he was at this time yesterday," suggested Bland.

Wetherell cursed again. He damned

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Teasdale and Templeton, the Cross-in-a-Box, the robbers, and himself for not having taken precautions against robbery.

AFTER a while, apparently growing calmer, he spoke. There was a note of anxiety in his voice.

"Teasdale's sure to keep his word, damn him! He'll come to take possession of the Double Cross to-morrow as sure as the devil. And it's likely he'll bring the sheriff with him."

"Sure," said Bland.

"You're handing out a lot of encouragement, I notice," grumbled Wetherell.

"I don't reckon there's any use of a man kidding himself," returned Bland. "Far as I can see, Teasdale isn't interested in the money you've lost. He's only interested in the money you're going to pay him, and the chances are that if you told him you'd been robbed of the fifteen thousand you was to pay him he'd think you were lying, and he'd go right on taking possession of the ranch. Looks to me, Wetherell, as if you'll have to raise another fifteen thousand even if you have to go and steal some more cattle."

"Teasdale will sure do it," declared Wetherell. "I never saw a man that bothers me as much as Teasdale bothers me. I never saw a man with such damned steady eyes. Seems he looks right straight through me. Sure as the devil, he'll do what he says he'll do! Bland, I've got to go back to the bank at Lazette and get some more money."

"And maybe get robbed again," said Bland.

"If they rob me again there'll have to be a gang of them!" declared Wetherell. "I'm leaving you right now. I'm riding over to the herd, and I'm getting Punditt and the outfit to go back to town with me. I'm drawing out another fifteen thousand, to pay Teasdale, and these boys are going to ride all the way home with me. And if Teasdale ain't there when I get back, they're going to ride to the Cross-in-a-Box with me. I'm not taking any more chances. But I don't like to stay away from the ranch house very long at a time since Clell and his riders made that visit, and I'm wanting you to go straight back there and take care of things while I'm gone."

"Sure," said Bland.

"I suppose my wife and Della will be worried," said Wetherell. "I've noticed that both of them are worrying a lot, lately. You'd better tell them what happened, and tell them that I've gone back to town. If Teasdale shows up while I'm gone tell him the same thing and hold him off. Maybe you'd better send him home, and tell him that I'll bring the money to the Cross-in-a-Box. The women will worry if he camps there till I get back."

They rode together diagonally across the valley and when they came to the grazing ground of a northern level they separated, Wetherell riding east and Bland taking a trail that led to the Double Cross ranch house.

It was not yet daylight when Bland rode in. He quietly stabled his horse and sought the foreman's shanty.

He slept soundly, to be awakened by the bright sunlight.

As he thought, the women, expecting Wetherell, and possibly staying awake waiting for him, had heard the black horse coming in to the stables just before dawn.

Jeff had heard him also, and Jeff was the first to greet Bland. But Bland passed Jeff with a word and crossed the level to the ranch house, where he

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saw both women standing at the rear door, watching him.

CHAPTER XX.

A PREMONITION OF TROUBLE.

BOTH women were worried, and he smiled reassuringly at them.

"Wetherell was delayed," he said gently. "We got halfway back, then Wetherell found that he had to go back to town again."

"Oh," exclaimed Mrs. Wetherell. "Something's happened!"

"Nobody's hurt, ma'am, if that's what you mean," Bland told her. "You see, ma'am, Wetherell lost the money he was to pay Teasdale, and he had to go back and get some more."

"Lost it?" said Mrs. Wetherell, breathlessly. "Why, how do you mean?"

"He didn't exactly lose it, ma'am. It was this way. Seems that when we were in Lazette, Wetherell did some talking about the money he had drawn out of the bank, and when we got about halfway home, it being just about dark, for we had got started late, we were held up by some riders who had evidently heard Wetherell talking about the money. They came upon us while we were drinking at a stream.

"We had our backs to them. There wasn't any trouble, ma'am. No shooting. We didn't have a chance. And they got away, clean. Seems they rode east. Back to town, I reckon. And then, knowing that Teasdale wouldn't accept any excuse, Wetherell rode to Punditt and the outfit, figuring that this time he'd have enough men around him, coming back, to safeguard the money. That's all, ma'am. Nobody's hurt, and nobody's going to be hurt, I reckon."

Having allayed the fears of the women, Bland joined Jeff, and they breakfasted together. Afterward, they went to the stable, where Bland groomed the black horse, watered and fed him and turned him into the corral. Bland and Jeff spent some time oiling and rubbing their saddles and bridles, and about mid-morning both went far up the creek to a pool, where they bathed and luxuriated in the water.

They returned to the bunk house, where they prepared and ate the noon meal, and then Jeff saddled and bridled a horse and rode eastward into the basin to take a look at the yearlings.

Shortly after noon Bland saw a rider coming toward the ranch house from the direction of the Cross-in-a-Box, and long before the rider reached the corral fence Bland had recognized him as Teasdale.

Teasdale was coming for his money.

Bland had a message for Teasdale from Wetherell, and when he saw Teasdale riding straight for the front of the ranch house he sauntered in that direction, and met Teasdale just as the latter was dismounting at the edge of the gallery.

DELLA and her mother had evidently watched Teasdale's approach, for Della was sitting in a chair on the gallery and Mrs. Wetherell was standing in the front doorway when Teasdale halted his horse. The women greeted Teasdale politely, but coldly, and became silent. They had seen Bland, and no doubt depended upon him to convey Wetherell's message.

"Wetherell isn't here, Teasdale," said Bland.

"Ain't here, eh? Well, he got the word I sent, didn't he?"

"I reckon he did, Teasdale. But he

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isn't here, and he can't get here in time to do what you're expecting him to do."

Teasdale's lips curved ironically.

"Trying to get out of it, I reckon?" he said.

"That isn't so," Della declared.

"You're running a little fast, Teasdale," said Bland. "You'll get your money just as quick as Wetherell can bring it. But I reckon there's an explanation coming to you, and I'm making it. I rode over to Lazette with Wetherell the day before yesterday. He got your fifteen thousand out of the bank. Riding back we were robbed. Four riders. It was dark, and we didn't get a look at them. They had their horses hidden somewhere, and we didn't even get a look at the brands on them. Anyway, they got Wetherell's fifteen thousand. And knowing there wasn't any use of trying to hold you off any longer, Wetherell got Punditt and the rest of the outfit to ride back to town with him to get another fifteen thousand.

"It will be sure fire this time, for Wetherell will have enough men with him to make sure that nobody gets the money. He told me to tell you not to wait for him, that he would bring the money to the Cross-in-a-Box as soon as he got back with it. That will be sometime to-morrow, I reckon, probably in the afternoon. I wouldn't worry a whole lot, Teasdale. Wetherell knows that you'll keep after him until you get the money!"

Teasdale smiled grimly.

"I'm glad of that," he said. "A sheriff's deputy is over at the Cross-in-a-Box now. I didn't bring him, because I felt sure that the money would be here. I'm not running after it any more. If Wetherell ain't at the Cross-in-a-Box with it by sundown to-morrow, I'll have the deputy here by midnight. I'm sorry to bother you, ladies, but business is business. So-long." He wheeled his horse and rode away.

BLAND had been standing near the edge of the gallery, where he had stood at the beginning of his fight with Clell, and now he seated himself, leaned against the front wall of the ranch house, took off his hat, ran a hand through his hair, and shook his head.

Speaking to nobody in particular, but seeming to think aloud, he said: "Teasdale, I'd say that you're a very considerate man."

"Is that supposed to be sarcasm?" said Della.

"Why, yes, ma'am."

"I was sure it must be," said Della. "It's quite evident that you don't admire Teasdale."

Bland had experienced some difficulty in pretending coolness toward his friend and employee. He thought that he had succeeded in convincing Della. Now he was sure of it.

However, he felt no elation. On the contrary, the thought that Della was involved in this affair, and that she would probably suffer as much if not more than Wetherell, oppressed him with a sense of guilt, even though he had decided that no matter what he did to Wetherell he would lighten the blow for the girl.

He did not yet know how this was to be done. And because the solution was not yet apparent he was troubled. He stared after Teasdale until he became aware that Della was watching him.

"You don't admire Teasdale, do you?" she persisted.

"Ma'am," he said gravely, "do you know why I should admire Teasdale?"

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Della's lips were pressed tightly together and her gaze was level. "You don't like to give direct answers, do you, Bland? I asked you if you admire Teasdale, and you answered me by asking another question."

"Why, I wasn't thinking of evading a direct answer, ma'am. If it will do you any good to know it, I don't mind telling you that I don't admire Teasdale."

This was the literal truth. His feelings toward Teasdale were deeper than admiration. Between the two men was a friendliness which was based upon complete understanding and sympathy. Admiration was not the word with which to express the affectionate regard that existed between them. Bland had not lied, and he was therefore able to steadily meet Della's direct gaze.

However, Della was not satisfied. Her enigmatic smile, which Bland thought thinly incredulous, warned him that she had not fully believed him.

It appeared that his manner irritated her, for presently she rose, told her mother that she was going for a ride, and went into the house.

Bland retained his seat on the edge of the gallery. Mrs. Wetherell took Della's chair. Both were silent. When Della reappeared, dressed for her ride, she crossed the gallery, stepped down, told her mother that she would be gone only an hour or two, and walked toward the corral.

Bland did not offer to saddle a horse for her, because he knew that his proffer of service would be declined.

MRS. WETHERELL and Bland were still silent when Della mounted and rode west along the river bank. They watched her until a turn in the trail took her out of sight.

"Bland," Mrs. Wetherell said finally, "how old are you?"

"About thirty, ma'am."

"I have been wondering about you," continued Mrs. Wetherell. "You Western men are different. I have observed that all the Westerners I've met appear to exude confidence, serenity, and an irritating calmness. These characteristics are more prominent in you than in any other Western man I have met.

"I have concluded that you have had greater experience than these other men, that you have more knowledge of life and people, and greater wisdom.

"In fact, Bland, there is something about you that causes me to believe that you are greater than the others. There is also something about you that bewilders me. Perhaps this is because I feel that you are capable of greater things than you are doing.

"You are an educated man, in spite of the fact that you occasionally employ the Western idioms of speech. There is a certain atmosphere of mystery about you."

She paused, clasping her hands in her lap and gazing out into the distance.

Bland observed that though her lips were pressed tightly together, they were threatening to quiver. However, it appeared she sternly repressed her emotions, and when she again looked at him her eyes were steady, though they were haunted by shades of anxiety.

"Bland," she said, "I have a premonition of trouble. It's about my husband and Della. And about you. Will you tell me why you came here?"

"I was looking for a job, ma'am, and Wetherell offered me one. I took it."

"Della has told me about my

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husband stealing the Cross-in-a-Box yearlings, and how Teasdale and his men caught him. Also, how you kept Teasdale and his men from hanging my husband, by taking the blame for stealing the yearlings. Therefore, when my husband hired you, you knew that he was a—a—cattle thief."

"I sort of suspected it, ma'am."

"Suspected it? Bland, you knew it! And, Bland, I know he is a cattle thief. For many months I have suspected him. I didn't want to believe it. I thought it strange that he would surround himself with men like Punditt and the others, who, I am certain, are villains.

"Then Clell and his men came here. You heard what they said. I thank you for what you did that day, but, Bland, you are not like the others, and yet you are here with them. You are a brave man. Do you mean harm to my husband?"

"I've nothing personal against Wetherell, ma'am."

The agony of doubt was in her eyes. It seemed she was attempting to read his thoughts. But she was not able to penetrate the quiet calm of his eyes, and she smiled faintly, bitterly.

He knew that her woman's intuition had warned her of him, and that she knew she was engaged in a hopeless battle.

"Bland," she said almost breathlessly, "you are not here to kill my husband, are you? You're quiet and cold, and your skill with a gun must be deadly or you would not have been able to kill Clell and his men. Have you come here to kill my husband?"

"I don't intend to kill your husband, ma'am. I give you my word on that. I had no intention of killing anybody. I was forced to kill Clell and his two men."

"Oh," she exclaimed gratefully, "I'm so glad of that!"

It now seemed to Bland that though one great burden had been lifted from her, another still remained. She sat, downcast, gazing at her hands.

"BLAND," she said suddenly, "what are your ideas about heredity?"

"They are rather vague, I expect, ma'am."

"Do you think that children inherit from their parents the instinct to sin?"

"If that were the case, I expect some children would be carrying a pretty heavy load, ma'am."

"Oh," she said reflectively, "they would. But do you think that my husband's or my own misdeeds would affect our children? I mean my daughter Della."

Bland glanced keenly at her. He was thinking of the words he had overheard that day when he had come unexpectedly upon her in the timber across the river:

"Please save Della from that."

Had Mrs. Wetherell been meditating upon the possibilities of heredity, then? Was she worrying about Della? Her voice had faltered a little just now, when she had referred to her husband's sins, and her own. How had she sinned?

Not greatly, he decided, for it was a sweet face that he was looking at, and in it was the humility and the resignation of a calm acceptance of life's responsibilities. He decided that if she had sinned, repentance had come swiftly, and so therefore she had not been hardened in the process.

"It would be stretching the idea of heredity, to believe that there would not be any peace of mind for prospective or actual parents," he said. "I

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reckon not one of us is perfect, ma'am. And maybe what most of us think are sins are only mistakes. It's only when a sin is repeated again and again that one might begin to think that it's so deeply rooted that it has become a part of character. I wouldn't even say that Wetherell's stealing cattle is a sin, ma'am. It's more likely that it's just greed. And a lot of people are greedy. Much as I've seen of Della, I'd say she has a mind of her own and knows how to use it, and that if she even feels like sinning it won't be because she inherited any impulse to do it."

"Bland," said Mrs. Wetherell, "Do you like Della?"

He gravely inspected his hat. He was aware that Mrs. Wetherell was watching him intently.

"Yes," he admitted.

"Have you noticed Punditt?"

"As much as I care to notice him."

"You don't like him."

"I can't say that I do."

"I think Della likes him, Bland."

Bland's eyelashes flickered. That was all the emotion he betrayed at Mrs. Wetherell's statement.

He felt, however, that Della might have been attracted to the man. Punditt's undoubted physical graces, his swagger and his boldness, may have impressed Della. If she had not suspected Punditt's real character she may have attributed to him a fictitious one that she had created out of her romantic ideals.

"Bland," said Mrs. Wetherell, interrupting his thoughts, "do you see how it is? I feel that something terrible is about to happen. I'm afraid for my husband, and afraid for Della. I wish we had never come out here. But we are here, and whatever is coming must be endured. But I feel so helpless. I've been watching you, Bland, and I know that even though you killed Clell and those other men, you will not be unjust. Will you promise that you won't injure Della, and that you will not kill my husband?"

"I reckon I can promise that, ma'am."

"Thank you," she said.

She went into the house, leaving Bland still sitting upon the edge of the gallery.

CHAPTER XXI.

OUT OF THE EAST.

IN the dining room of the Cross-in-a-Box ranch house about noon on the day following the conversation between Mrs. Wetherell and Bland, Teasdale was sitting at the long table opposite a man of about thirty and a woman a few years younger. They had finished eating and were sitting idly back in their chairs, talking.

The woman was small, vivacious, with alert, smiling eyes. She had a wealth of dark hair, a rather small nose which had a pert upward tilt, a mouth which might have been considered a trifle too large for perfection but which had a way of breaking into a smile of such friendliness that one had no time or inclination to think of perfection.

The man was a big fellow, but a semi-invalid, apparently, for beside his chair, on the floor, were a crutch and a cane. He had wide, muscular shoulders. He was tall and slender and there was about him, even despite the crutches, an appearance of litheness and virility that hinted of the athlete. He had a broad, white forehead, keen gray eyes and a ready smile, although the lines of his jaws and the slight thrust to his chin indicated a fighting spirit.

Both he and the girl were listening

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attentively to Teasdale, who was talking.

"Well, I don't know that I ought to tell you this," said Teasdale, "but I feel that I must or maybe you'll accidentally jam things up a bit for Templeton. You see Jim hasn't been in the habit of paying much attention to the Cross-in-a-Box. He's been devoting most of his time to the Rancho Seco, and sort of letting me run the Cross-in-a-Box to suit myself. None of the men that are working for the Cross-in-a-Box know Templeton.

"As a matter of fact, when I wrote him a certain letter he came up here and dropped the name Templeton altogether. He's Jim Bland to everybody here, and they all know him, if at all, as a gunfighter from down south. I don't know when he'll visit the Cross-in-a-box again, but when he does you'll oblige me by dropping the Templeton off his name, so's nobody will get wise." He looked at the young man, adding, "You went to college with him, Farnsworth, and you know what kind of a man he is."

"I'll swear he's up to some trick, masquerading like that," said Farnsworth. "But if it's a trick, there's no practical joke in it, you can depend upon that. For Jim was always in dead earnest about everything."

"Well, I'd say he's in earnest now," said Teasdale. "I reckon I've got to tell you."

TEASDALE rolled and lit a cigarette. Then he looked at the girl.

"Mary," he said, "you never saw Jim, I reckon."

"No. But I've heard Allan talk about him. Allan thinks he's the greatest man in the world. He must be if Allan says so, and I'm just dying to meet him."

"Well, I don't know about him being the greatest man in the world, Mary," said Teasdale. "But I'm mighty sure he's a man. You see, when I wrote him that I'd been missing some yearlings up here, he didn't write me a scorching letter asking me why in the devil I didn't catch and hang the rustler. That wouldn't be him. I looked out of the door one morning at dawn, and there he was standing beside the corral fence beside that big black horse of his. And he's been here ever since, playing a lone hand."

"Do you mean that he's trying to catch a rustler all by himself?" inquired Mary.

"Not trying to catch him, Mary. Trying to reform him."

"How interesting! Then he knows who the rustler is."

"I reckon you know him too," returned Teasdale. "It's your old friend Wetherell."

"Mr. Teasdale! You don't mean it!"

"I sure mean it," said Teasdale. "I'll say this, though, that Wetherell ain't reforming very fast. But I think Jim will bring him around, give him time."

With Farnsworth and his wife attentively listening, Teasdale now related in detail what had happened since his employer had arrived at the Cross-in-a-Box. When he told how Bland had spent more than two weeks in the mountains that divided the Double Cross range from the Cross-in-a-Box, waiting to secure evidence against Wetherell, and how he had finally succeeded in getting himself hired by Wetherell, Allan Farnsworth smiled broadly.

"Yes," he said. "That's just like Jim."

When further on in his recital Teasdale mentioned Bland's meeting with

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Della Wetherell, Mary's eyes gleamed with a sudden new interest.

"Is Della Wetherell pretty, Mr. Teasdale?" she asked.

"She's a hummer!" declared Teasdale.

"That makes it more interesting for Jim," suggested Farnsworth. He glanced at Mary.

"Naturally," she said. "And if I'm not mistaken, Mr. Templeton—I mean Bland, will not devote himself completely to the task of reforming her father."

"Well, that's what I thought," said Teasdale. "But Jim's a hard worker in anything he undertakes. I'm certain that he's made some progress with Wetherell, but I've got some doubts about how fast he's getting along with Della. The last time Jim was over here he told me Della hated him."

"If he is the man you and Allan have described, I don't see how any woman could hate him," said Mary.

"She'd ordered him away from the Double Cross," said Teasdale. "And Jim was feeling pretty glum over it. He said he was sticking, though, and I reckon he will."

"He would," said Farnsworth. "Any girl that Jim falls in love with won't have much chance of getting away from him."

WHEN Teasdale finished his story, which included all the incidents of his and Bland's experiences with Wetherell up to and including Teasdale's visit to the Double Cross the day before, which latter incident he described vividly by drawing a word picture of Bland sitting on the edge of the gallery twirling his hat and enduring the glances of Mrs. Wetherell and Della, Farnsworth's face grew serious.

"Teasdale," he said, "the twenty thousand dollars that Jim sent to Mary, advising her that it was money he had recovered for the Addison estate, was the amount he collected over and above the value of the yearlings that Wetherell stole."

"That's right," answered Teasdale.

"I see," said Farnsworth. "Wetherell's reform isn't voluntary."

"I wouldn't say that it is," answered Teasdale. "If you'd wait for Wetherell to return the money he stole from the Addison estate, there wouldn't be much chance of your spending it in this life."

Farnsworth and Mary exchanged glances. Mary's eyes were wide with amazement but Farnsworth's were gleaming with delight.

"If you hadn't told me, I should have known it was Jim," he declared. "In the letter he sent along with the draft, he mentioned that Wetherell was betraying indications of reforming. I might have guessed it."

Mary's eyes were gravely serious as she glanced from her husband to Teasdale.

"I'm glad that Mr. Wetherell began to think of reforming when he did," she said. "The draft made it possible for Allan and me to come out here. We should not have been able to do it otherwise, and the doctors insisted that Allan needed a change of climate. But from what I have been able to gather, Mrs. Wetherell and her daughter are innocent, and have no knowledge of Mr. Wetherell's crime. They will be the unsuspecting victims of a tragedy. And it *will* be a tragedy to them."

Teasdale smiled.

"I ain't worrying about that, ma'am," he said. "Jim's after Wetherell and it will be Wetherell that he'll punish."

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Farnsworth was gazing meditatively at the table top. "Jim is wise," he said. "He's merely after the money that Wetherell stole. It amounts to about one hundred and ten thousand dollars.

"We'll have a talk with Jim, won't we, Mary?"

Teasdale now told them that he was expecting a visit from Wetherell sometime during the afternoon, and he cautioned them to keep indoors as much as possible so that Wetherell would not see and recognize them. The men of the outfit were away. No one but Teasdale and the Mexican cook and housekeeper knew that Farnsworth had arrived, and Teasdale had already decided that they were to be known as the Allans.

During the greater part of the afternoon the Farnsworths and Teasdale were on the wide gallery, talking, and then, just before twilight began to steal over the land Teasdale saw a dust cloud sweeping down the basin.

"I reckon that's Wetherell and some of his riders coming now," he said. "If you folks will just step inside where Wetherell won't be able to see you you'll save him a shock and make it a whole lot easier for Jim to do what he's intending to do. I reckon you'll be curious, though. If you stand behind the curtains of one of the front windows you'll be able to get a good look at Wetherell. I aim to be sitting right here."

The Farnsworths went into the house, and half an hour later they were peering through one of the heavily curtained windows at a group of horsemen which had drawn up before the gallery.

"That's Wetherell," said Mary Farnsworth. "He's a little older, and he's tanned, but otherwise he's just the same. I'd like to go out there and shake him!"

Farnsworth laughed.

"I think we can leave that to Jim," he said.

CHAPTER XXII.

A DEBT IS PAID.

AS she watched the faces of the riders who had accompanied Wetherell, Mary Farnsworth shrank back from the window.

She and Allan had gone first to the Rancho Seco, expecting to find Templeton there, and they had been escorted from the Rancho Seco by two riders. Also, they had remained at Templeton's southern ranch for two days, awaiting repairs to the buckboard which had brought them to the Cross-in-a-Box. Therefore, by this time she and Allan were familiar with cowboys, for Mary, particularly, had thoroughly studied the two who had comprised their escort.

The riders in the group surrounding Wetherell were not the type with which she was acquainted. She whispered to Allan:

"What terrible looking men! The one talking to Mr. Teasdale now, Allan. He is handsome, isn't he? But oh, Allan, he could be just as cruel as he is handsome. Ugh!"

The voices of the men floated to them through the open window.

They heard Wetherell say:

"I've brought you the money to pay off that note, Teasdale. This deal has cost me forty thousand dollars!"

"Twenty-five thousand, Wetherell," corrected Teasdale.

"Forty thousand, I tell you, Teasdale! Three days ago I drew fifteen thousand out of the bank at Lazette

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to pay off that damned note, and on the way back to the Double Cross Bland and me were held up by robbers. I had to make another trip back to town and get fifteen thousand more. I'm telling you that I think you're a bigger robber than the men that took the fifteen thousand from me."

"Wetherell," said Teasdale, quietly, "if you'd been doing any thinking you wouldn't have stolen those yearlings. And I'm wanting you to know that you didn't pay the twenty-five thousand for the yearlings. You paid it to save your neck. And I'm warning you that if you steal any more Cross-in-a-Box stock, all the money you've got won't keep me from hanging you."

Wetherell's face paled with anger. There were some jeers from Wetherell's riders, and Punditt laughed.

"Try to do any hangin' when there is somebody around to see you," he sneered.

TEASDALE pinned Punditt with a glance.

"Who's talking?" he said. "You're Punditt, eh? Well, Punditt, I'm telling you that you only escaped hanging by the skin of your teeth the day you ran off a bunch of the Cross-in-a-Box steers with the bunch you collected from Dave Clell. There was twenty Cross-in-a-Box riders four hours behind you when you hit that pass going through the mountains north of the Double Cross, and any one of the twenty Cross-in-a-Box riders would have been mighty willing to grab the other end of a rope that was around your neck."

Punditt had been amazed to discover that Teasdale knew of the theft. But he recovered quickly and smiled derisively.

"Teasdale, it's too bad your riders weren't a little more active," he said. "As for you hangin' me, I reckon if you keep tellin' me that, I'll die laffin'."

Mary and Allan saw Teasdale pass a slip of paper to Wetherell.

"Here's your note, Wetherell," he said.

Wetherell took the paper and tore it into small shreds, which he permitted to trickle through his fingers and be swirled away by the slight breeze. He looked at Teasdale, wheeled his horse and rode away, followed by his riders.

After a while Teasdale stuck his head into a window and grinned at Mary and Allan.

"They've gone," he said. "You can come out now, if you like. I don't think they'll bother us again, at least not very soon."

It appeared, however, that Teasdale had erred, for later that evening, when the basin was drenched with a flood of white moonlight, Teasdale, Allan and Mary, standing under a giant cottonwood near the ranch house, saw a lone rider coming toward them from the east. Silently they watched him.

"Do you think it's one of Wetherell's men?" inquired Mary.

Teasdale had been peering intently at the rider, and now he chuckled. "It's Bland," he announced.

He walked slowly away from the tree, Mary and Allan following eagerly. When they appeared in the moonlight Bland saw them and veered toward them.

He rode close to them, slid from the black horse, and walked forward, his spurs jingling musically.

He was evidently amazed when he saw that there was a woman at the ranch house, for he stopped suddenly and removed his hat.

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"Don't be bashful, you old pirate!" laughed Farnsworth. "It's only my wife."

THERE was a silence. Then Bland said slowly:

"Mrs. Farnsworth, he is still uncontrollable, isn't he?"

"Quite," declared Mary, delightedly.

Bland's first word had vindicated what Allan had been telling her about his old friend. It was not hard to get acquainted with him, and she could instantly feel his personality. She gazed into his eyes with solemn admiration as he took her hand and gripped it firmly. Already she knew why Allan liked him, why Allan had praised him.

"So you are Jim Templeton? I mean, Bland," she added quickly. "I have heard so much about you that I feel an introduction is entirely unnecessary." Her eyes danced with gratitude, but she continued soberly, earnestly: "Jim Bland, I want to thank you for the money you sent us. Perhaps you will never know how much we appreciated it."

"It wasn't much, ma'am. I reckon Wetherell must be seeing the light lately. He isn't the man he used to be. There's indications that his reform will be complete, give him time."

Mary's eyes were laughing, but she succeeded in keeping her expression grave.

"Yes," she said, "Mr. Teasdale has been telling us about Wetherell's reformation."

"Ma'am, I've certainly done my best to show him the error of his ways," said Bland. He looked at Teasdale and said, almost sorrowfully: "Well, ma'am, Teasdale's also been laboring in the Lord's vineyard. Between us, if we have any luck, we'll drag Wetherell from the land of the damned."

He now turned to Farnsworth and silently held out his hand. The hand was gripped tightly, but there was no word spoken.

Allan and Mary were enthusiastic about the country, and a little while later as they sat in a group on the gallery, Mary told the entire story of Wetherell's deception.

Wetherell had been very clever. He had deceived a court, but he had not deceived Mary.

"He was so smooth that the law could not get him," said Farnsworth. "But it seems that out here the law isn't everything. There's something else."

There was a silence, during which Mary watched Bland.

"Wetherell was here to-day," she said. "I got a good look at him from behind the curtains of the front windows. I could see no indication of reform."

"You couldn't?" inquired Bland. He spoke somewhat disappointedly. "And you'd think that to-day, of all days, it would show in his face."

"What would show?" asked Mary.

"Why, that his heart was being softened. Ma'am, Wetherell came over here to-day to pay fifteen thousand dollars on the bill he owes you. Hasn't Teasdale told you? Teasdale's in the habit of telling everything he knows, ma'am."

Teasdale laughed.

"Don't pay any attention to him, Mrs. Farnsworth. A while ago, when you called him Bland, I reckon he knowed that I'd been telling you things about him and about Wetherell."

"Our methods of collecting from Wetherell are maybe a little bit unorthodox," said Bland. "We could

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not prevail upon him to come right out and pay back the money and acknowledge he had done wrong, so we had to scheme a little. Things don't seem to go so well for Wetherell. If Teasdale has been talking, he's told you how Wetherell drove away some of our yearlings, and how, to keep himself from getting hanged, he paid us twenty-five thousand dollars for stock which was worth only five thousand. He was paying the extra twenty thousand on what he owed you, Mrs. Farnsworth. And then the other day he got me to ride to town with him to get fifteen thousand dollars cash that he owed Teasdale for the stolen stock. The fifteen thousand was a part of the twenty-five thousand already mentioned.

"Well, now, you'd think that was bad enough, wouldn't you? But what happened? Coming back to the Double Cross — that's Wetherell's ranch—we were held up by four robbers, who took Wetherell's fifteen thousand. Well, that left Wetherell just where he was before. The fifteen thousand had not been paid, so Wetherell had to go back to town again and get another fifteen thousand. I reckon that's what he came here for to-day—to pay Teasdale the fifteen thousand. Is that right, Teasdale?"

"Right."

FARNSWORTH was watching Bland's face intently, but he said nothing.

Mary too, was watching Bland. But Bland, apparently having finished, sat very still, gazing out into the basin. After a while Bland spoke, solemnly.

"Teasdale," he said, "the West lost a good outlaw when you decided to stay honest."

"Jim," threatened Teasdale, "if you say anything about that I swear I will shoot you."

"Get your gun out, Teasdale," said Bland, his voice betraying emotion, "I'm telling. It always annoys me when folks try to do all the talking." He looked at Farnsworth and Mary.

"Folks," he said, "Teasdale has got fifteen thousand dollars that belongs to you. It seems that somebody—I reckon it was Jeff Lefingwell, wasn't it, Teasdale?—told Teasdale that Wetherell was going after the money. And so Teasdale and three of his men sneaked over there and took the money from Wetherell. I can tell by looking at you that he hasn't given it to you yet."

Teasdale laughed, drew a roll of bills from a pocket and placed it in Mary's hands.

"Ma'am," he said, "Jim's trail is sure hard to anticipate."

Mary's eyes were wide with amazement and admiration.

"Oh, you wonderful men!" she exclaimed.

"First principles," laughed Farnsworth. "Mary," he said, "he *is* a pirate, isn't he?"

"Wetherell didn't suspect," declared Mary. "I was watching him when he gave Mr. Teasdale the money. He was disgusted but not suspicious."

They sat silent for a time, watching the moonlight working its magic upon the great valley, whose floor, flooded with silvery light, gleamed and glittered and rippled like the surface of an inland sea. Rimmed by mountains that from a distance seemed like wild cliffs of a rugged shore line, dotted here and there by the bald knobs of hills that resembled islands, the illusion was startling. Straight out in front of the ranch house was a vast bay with an ever-widening beach that

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receded gradually into the northern distance.

Westward, the silvery flood vanished behind a great promontory opposite a long, low line of hills that seemed like a peninsula with a deep bay beyond it. Far away were other mountains and hills, mounting high above the silvery flood. Through distant channels the glowing stream ran, mile upon mile, broadening and expanding until it finally vanished into a glowing haze.

"Oh, isn't it beautiful!" exclaimed Mary.

"It's a right pretty sight, some nights," agreed Bland. "It's just the place for Allan. And I don't reckon that Allan's wife would find it hard to stay here."

"I love it," declared Mary.

TEASDALE and Allan had descended from the gallery and were walking toward the corral fence. Teasdale, tall, erect, straight; Allan with his crutch and cane, big but somehow pathetic.

Mary insisted upon Bland telling her something about Della Wetherell. But Bland was reticent. "She's a nice girl," was about all he would say.

"Mr. Teasdale tells me she is pretty."

"Yes."

"I hope she likes you."

"I don't think she does, ma'am."

"How can you tell, Jim?"

"I reckon that's easy, ma'am. She tells me she hates me."

Mary smiled.

"Jim," she said, "when a woman tells a man she hates him, she is telling a lie that she is trying to make herself believe. She feels your strength, she knows that you have power over her and she is afraid she will surrender to you. And she doesn't want to surrender until she knows she cannot help it."

Bland rose, straightened.

"I've got to get back to the Double Cross, ma'am," he said. "I'm thanking you. But I reckon that when I get through doing what I intend to do to her father, she'll be mighty certain she doesn't want me."

He said good night to her, shook her hand and told her he wished she and Allan would stay the entire summer. Then he walked to Teasdale and Farnsworth. Mary saw him take leave of them, mount his horse and ride away.

"She'll take him," decided Mary. "She won't be able to resist him."

CHAPTER XXIII.

A RUTHLESS ATTACK.

IT was a lazy, slumberous morning, about three weeks after Bland's visit to the Cross-in-a-Box, and Mary Farnsworth had slept late.

Allan had made arrangements to ride out at dawn with Teasdale to a far section of the range, where the outfit was working, and Mary had awakened to find him gone. Teasdale had told her that he would have a horse saddled and bridled for her use, should she care to ride. She had been riding regularly, for she had been a good horsewoman before coming to the Cross-in-a-Box, and she welcomed the recreation.

Yet she was more interested in Allan. The outdoor life was doing him a great deal of good, and in spite of his physical affliction he could ride rather well. She knew that he enjoyed the company of the outfit and Teasdale, and so she had often pretended lack of interest in riding in

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order to give him an opportunity to be with Teasdale and the other men. Usually, after Allan and Teasdale left, Mary would ride out alone. Apparently Teasdale knew what she was doing, for every morning she found the same horse, saddled and bridled, waiting for her.

"Don't ride too far, ma'am," he cautioned one day when Allan was not near. "You might get lost, you know."

She had confined her rides to the country immediately surrounding the ranch house, but each day she had daringly increased the distance, until yesterday she had reached the foothills of a mountain range eastward. Yesterday, however, she had got started late, and she had reached the foothills late in the afternoon, or she would have gone on, up a pass she had seen in the mountain range where, she was certain, she would have had a wonderful view of the surrounding country. She had decided that to-day she would ascend the pass.

It was about mid-morning when she mounted and rode into the timber southeast of the ranch house, following a faint trail.

The timber extended southward interminably. Before entering it she could see where the trees faded into space. North, near where she entered the timber, were the wild crags and buttes that formed the southern rim of the Cross-in-a-Box basin through which Wetherell had driven the stolen yearlings. At first this section was narrow, but it broadened as she rode, until at last it was many miles wide. It narrowed again near the mountain range, the forest seeming to gradually encroach upon it. It was about noon when she reached the foothills from which she had seen the pass in the mountains. There was no timber here.

The pass led up between the peaks of two mountains, and when she reached its summit she found herself upon a broad bench which was several hundred feet above the plains. She could look down through the pass into a great, brown basin, and she halted her horse and paused to admire it.

She sat there for some time scanning the remote beauties that were unfolded before her, and then, observing a trail across the bench, she decided to follow it, hoping that somewhere ahead it would provide another view of the country.

The trail led her between two rocky crags that formed the mountain top, and then emerged upon another bench. This bench was several hundred feet wide and was dotted with clumps of scraggly, stunted oak. East of her was a low cliff rising from a shoulder. Her glance at the cliff gave her the impression that it was a sort of a ledge. There was scraggly timber up there too, and a line of nondescript brush grew along the edge. It seemed to her that there was a trail up there, but she decided not to search for it.

SHE felt she had gone far enough, so she dismounted, tied her horse to the slender trunk of a tree and turned to enjoy the view.

It was as she had hoped. From here the panorama was beautiful. She was far above the forest through which she had ridden to reach this spot, and she could see the flashing color tones of the leaves as they caught the sunlight. She could look many miles up the east basin.

She could even see the roof and part of one of the wings of the Cross-in-a-Box ranch house.

The ride up the mountain had been exhausting and she was a trifle tired, so

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she seated herself on a big rock, drew her legs up under her and relaxed.

She was absorbed with the view she had of the country from this vantage point and she eagerly studied the wondrous features that were visible.

An hour passed, and still another, but she had forgotten time in her interest.

The amazing thing to her about this country was the silence, which was so deep and solemn that it brought over one a sensation of awe, and aroused apprehensions that one's reason could not definitely explain.

She was thinking of beginning her homeward trip when into the vacuum-like stillness came a faint tapping, which sounded remarkably like the sound that would be made by some one delicately striking a stone or other hard object with a hammer. However, she had heard of no geologist being in the vicinity, and so she interpreted the sound as being the iron-shod hoofs of a horse traversing a far trail.

Curious, she delayed starting homeward, and after a while the tapping sound resolved itself into the steady *clip-clop* of a loping horse.

Having identified the sound, she sought to locate it and presently succeeded. More than that, she saw a horse and rider perhaps a mile or so away, coming toward her along a broad ledge.

The rider's figure was one that she had seen before, she thought, but she was not certain. Horse and rider vanished around a shoulder of rock, and she thought that perhaps they had veered off upon another trail. The hoof beats grew fainter.

She was reluctant to leave this spot, and she sat there for another quarter of an hour, thinking of Wetherell. Then she heard the hoof beats again, and this time they were louder and closer—so close that they startled her into turning her head. And then she saw the horse and rider within a hundred feet of her.

The rider was Wetherell. Apparently he had seen her from a distance, and he headed the horse directly toward her, not pulling him down until he was within a dozen feet of her.

Startled, she slid off the rock and stood erect, facing him.

She had never liked the man and was somewhat relieved to discover that apparently he had not recognized her. It had been several years since they had seen each other, and while Wetherell had changed but little, she herself had passed from the adolescent period to full womanhood with the inevitable resulting changes.

Still, it appeared that Wetherell was struggling with his memory, and that he had a half-formed conviction that he had seen her before, for he was staring at her as if perplexed.

HE dismounted, trailed the reins and moved slowly toward her. In his eyes was still the perplexed expression, but now there had come also a gleam of suspicion.

He had looked at Mary's horse, and now his gaze was roving over the girl, as if he were observing every detail of her appearance.

Mary saw his eyes begin to gleam with recognition and amazement. He came close to her, peered intently into her eyes, and she saw the color drain from his cheeks. He stiffened, stood rigid, both hands clenched, the arms hanging stiffly at his sides. The muscles of his jaws and neck twitched. His mouth opened.

"You're Mary Addison!" he whispered.

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"Yes," she answered.

Wetherell moved slowly backward. He was still rigid and he passed one hand over his eyes as if striving to clear them of some terrible vision. He rocked back and forth as if under stress of some mighty emotion, and for a time it appeared as though he was trying to speak, and that words would not come.

While he stood there immovable and speechless, Mary slowly retreated from him, walking backward toward her horse. She reached the animal, gathered up the trailing reins, and turned when she observed Wetherell moving toward her.

Apparently Wetherell had conquered the terrific passions that had gripped him, for though his face was white, his eyes had lost their wild glare, and his lips were curved into a smile.

"Wait, Mary," he said in a voice that was strangely placative. "Don't go yet. I want to talk to you."

He was too calm. His strange manner had aroused Mary's apprehensions. Having never liked him, and knowing what he had done to her father's estate, she was positive that she could not trust him. Yet she hesitated. Then, catching a queer gleam in his eyes, she placed a foot in a stirrup and vaulted into the saddle, quickly wheeling the horse so that she faced Wetherell.

He stopped at a distance of half a dozen feet from her.

"Shucks, Mary," he said in a wheedling voice, "you're not going to run off like that, are you, without giving me a chance to say a word or two to you?"

"I don't think I have anything to say to you," answered Mary. "And I don't think that I care to listen to anything you have to say. But I do want you to know that I know you stole the property my father left to me."

Wetherell stood motionless. He had no reply to make to her charge. He looked guilty. His manner was that of a culprit who recognizes the futility of making a defense. But there was more than that in his manner. In the way he stood, in the slight crouch of his body, in the looseness of his lips, in the furtive, stealthy gleam in his eyes, was evidence that he meditated violent and ruthless action.

MARY was conscious of the evilness in him and she gathered the reins tightly.

Wetherell moved a step nearer.

"What are you doing in this country?" he questioned.

"That is my business."

"That's a Cross-in-a-Box horse you're riding," he said. "You staying at Templeton's place?"

"Yes."

"And you've been shooting off your mouth to Templeton, haven't you? You've been telling him about how I took your money away from you, eh? Well, what if I did take it? What are you going to do about it? I didn't do anything that the law could lay hands on me for, and I needed the money more than you needed it. But I can see what's happened. In some way you've got hold of Templeton and gained his sympathy. I've been wondering why Templeton had it in for me, and why he made me pay twenty-five thousand dollars for a bunch of steers that were worth five thousand. And I think I know who held me up when I was coming from Lazette with that fifteen thousand dollars. It's a scheme of yours and Templeton's to get that hundred and ten thousand dollars back. I've been dumb not to have tumbled to that before. But I never thought of you, damn you!"

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He suddenly leaped toward her, grasped viciously at the reins.

Alertly watching him, Mary jumped the horse straight at him.

Too late Wetherell tried to spring aside. The horse's shoulder struck him, knocked him half a dozen feet, where he landed heavily upon his back, cursing. There was a rushing clatter of hoofs and Mary's horse, bearing her upon his back, skittered along the bench and out of sight beyond a jutting shoulder. The animal reappeared again almost instantly upon the slope that led down the mountainside to the foothills.

Wetherell had got to his feet. He was a raging madman. He ran to a great rock, threw himself flat upon it, drew his heavy six-shooter and took deliberate aim at Mary's horse, which was swiftly, though carefully, descending the slope.

The distance was too great for accurate shooting. Wetherell saw his bullets knocking dust from the mountainside beyond Mary. However, he did not cease shooting until horse and rider were far down on the plains that stretched to the timber.

After a while Wetherell got up from the rock, holstered the six-shooter and shook a fist at the vanishing horse and rider. For a time he stood, his face pale, his shoulders sagging, his chin on his chest. Then he slowly wagged his head uncertainly from side to side, strode slowly to his horse, mounted and rode back the way he had come. A strange, heavy, brooding silence again reigned upon the bench. This silence was broken only by the steady *clip-clop* of the hoofs of Wetherell's horse as the animal threaded the rock trails of the distant mountain passes.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

Strange Dishes

FOOD is food, the wild tribes in the Philippines say, and dogs are food. Though prohibited by law to kill dogs for food purposes, the practice is nevertheless secretly carried on. Bootleggers dealing in dogs round up the stray curs roaming the streets of towns and villages and drive them into the hills and jungles where they are sold to the mountain people for exorbitant prices. Though every effort is made to stop the natives from killing the dogs and eating them, little or nothing can be accomplished. The natives stoutly maintain that they buy the dogs only for pets. However, although hundreds of dogs are taken into the jungles yearly, none ever come out.

Python steak is another delicacy. Though the government forbids the eating of dogs, nothing has been done to curb the eating of snakes. Huge pythons, twenty and thirty feet in length, are killed by the natives, their excuse being that the pythons eat their pigs. But once the snake is killed a huge barbecue is held wherein the natives partake hungrily of the juicy steaks.

Throughout the Islands a highly esteemed delicacy among the common people is balut. Balut is a dish consisting of ducks' eggs that have been kept in warm sawdust and are considered ready for use when near the hatching point.

P. William Zukas.

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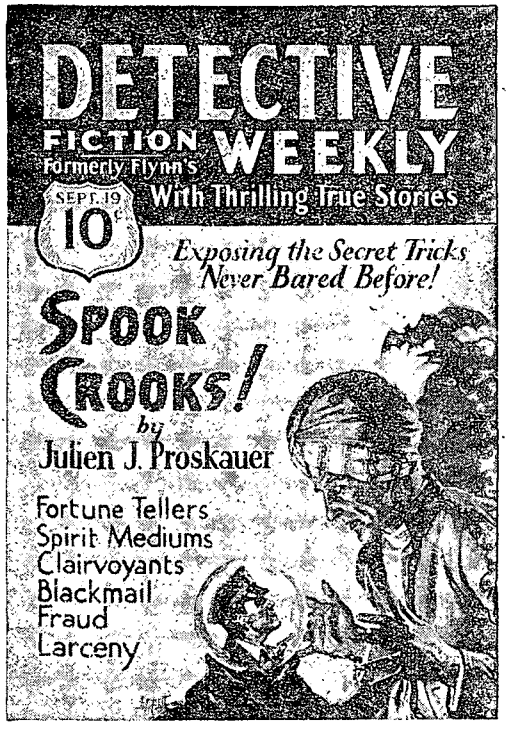

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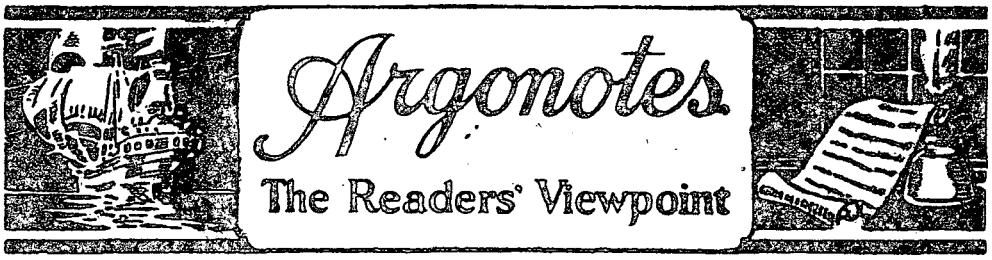

ZORRO is coming, riding fast and recklessly, an outlawed Robin Hood of the glamorous old days of Spanish California—fighting wrong with whip and sword and daring. And the character Douglas Fairbanks made world-famous will return to the ARGOSY on October 3.

Flint, Mich.

About two years ago when the reprint question arose, you stated that Johnston McCulley was writing another "*Zorro*" story. Would it be possible for you to tell us when we are to get this story?

CLAYTON WORDEN.

"ANY person can afford ARGOSY in hard times":

Pico, Calif.

I have been reading your magazine for the last five months and enjoy it very much. It doesn't cost much, yet the ARGOSY is a good magazine; and any person can afford it in these hard times.

A few of my favorite authors are: Theodore Roscoe, F. V. W. Mason, H. Bedford-Jones, MacIsaac and John H. Thompson. Keep the ARGOSY as it is and it will always be a success.

O. ROBERTSON.

"WILL maintain its position at the top":

Los Angeles, Calif.

We are two brothers. We have been reading the ARGOSY off and on for several years, but started reading it regularly this year. Enclosed are ten coupons for an ARGOSY drawing.

So far we have enjoyed all of your stories except "The Green Goddess" and "Guns of the American." If you keep your stories up to the intellectual level of which the majority of your authors are capable, there is no doubt that your magazine will maintain its position at the top of the popular magazines.

We enjoyed immensely "Sinister House" by Rouse. Here was a story packed with action, thrills and romance. Fred MacIsaac's stories are always good. Other authors we follow closely are Pierce, Thompson, Mason, Whitfield, Roscoe, Grinstead, Perry, Allman, Wheeler-Nicholson, Carse and Brent.

We especially like stories of the fantastic type if they do not insult your reason. O. A. Kline is our favorite author. We believe you would do well to have more of this type story as the modern age leans greatly toward that kind of thought.

S. and R. MCKNIGHT.

HIGH commendation for "Captain Judas":

Hollywood, Calif.

My sincere compliments to Mr. F. V. W. Mason on having finished reading his "Captain Judas." The writer, a constant reader of your fiction for the past eight years, deems it necessary to express his vote of approval on one of the best stories he has ever read in *any magazine*.

Congratulations to your editors in their superb selections.

J. W. DORFF.

"CUMMINGS is in a rut?" What do you think of his recent "Bandits of the Cylinder"? And we'll bet 'most anything that you'll find next October's "The Jungle Girl" *different*:

Indianapolis, Ind.

Kline is the best fantastic writer that you have now. Cummings is in a rut. His stories now are too much like ones he published some years ago. Farley is not so hot. His story "The Radio Menace" was good, but "The Radio Flyers" and "The Radio Gun-Runners" were terrible. His first two or three stories were excellent. "Caves of Ocean" was fair. If Cummings would give us more stories like "A Brand New World," he would be a top-notcher. Starzl is a good fantastic writer.

George F. Worts is a swell writer. You can't give us too much of *Gillian Hazeltine*. Hulbert Footner should go back to writing western stories and give *Mme. Storey* a rest. The "Semi Dual" story that you published last was not up to standard either.

The "Peter the Brazen" stories do not attract

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me. I would like to see a good story of *John Solomon* running in ARGOSY all the time, though. Clarence E. Mulford should still be a contributor, too. On the whole, though, ARGOSY is as good as it ever was and that's saying a good deal.

SCOTT WALLS.

THE proof of the pudding—we mean, the popularity:

Linneus, Md.

I have been a fairly steady reader of ARGOSY since 1919 and I like it better than any other magazine on the market, bar none.

It is not possible to please over half of any bunch of readers at one time and no one expects to buy a book and like everything printed in it. One thing I can say in favor of ARGOSY is this: Go in any news-stand or book store about Thursday or Friday and you can get extra copies of almost any other magazine, but try to get an ARGOSY. Its like hunting a needle in a haystack.

ALVIN MCDOWELL.

"BANNER months for ARGOSY":

Los Angeles, Calif.

The last two months were banner months for ARGOSY fans, with such fine novels as "Captain Judas," by Mason; "Jan of the Jungle," by Kline; "Chinese for Racket," by Brent; "Bent-finger," by Roscoe; "Pirate of Wall Street," by MacIsaac, and that thrilling novelette, "Speed-Storm."

How about another novel from the pen of Morgan Mansfield? His last one, "His Service to Folly," in 1928, was very,very good.

KENNY MOORE.

WE disrupt Wednesday's lunch hour:

Klamath Falls, Ore.

My husband and myself have been reading the ARGOSY for years and we surely like it. The only thing I don't like about it is that on Wednesday at noon I can't get my husband to eat his lunch and if I forget to get it he will go out of the house without eating, so what are you going to do about it?

FLORENCE GARRISON.

EDUCATIONAL, this reader finds ARGOSY:

Lynn, Mass.

I have been reading ARGOSY for the past three years. I find the ARGOSY is, in many respects, educational, as it takes you to many countries and introduces you to the customs of many people. I enjoy most of the stories very much, but detective stories by MacIsaac and Worts are my favorites.

I don't like impossible stories, but I wish you would have more for the good of those who do like them.

In looking over some old numbers, I find stories by Johnston McCulley. Here's hoping I find more stories by McCulley in future issues.

WILLIAM MURPHY.

"GETTING better and better":

Thornton, Ill.

Your magazine is getting better and better and don't let anyone tell you different.

The best serial lately was "The Battle of the Silent Men," by Wheeler-Nicholson; best novelette, "The Devil's Due" by Gardner; and short story, "Three Cat's-eyes," by Bedford-Jones.

Let's have some more stories about *Major Brane*. Also a long baseball story.

PETE MISTOVICH.

FINDS the short features interesting and instructive:

New York City.

Reading "Argonotes," I observe that readers praise the stories in ARGOSY, but rarely, if ever, mention "Other Features," the half dozen or so short articles that appear at the end of many stories in each issue.

These articles are very interesting, because they detail odd facts, phenomena, and customs. Their topics, by giving us curious information on all countries and peoples of the globe, show us what an interesting world we live in; travel may broaden a person's outlook, but reading these articles is an inexpensive and less strenuous substitute.

Many of these short features are sufficiently interesting and romantic to become the basis of stories. For example, couldn't some author fabricate a mystery story around "The Phantom Light on Old Flat Top"? The strange light that hovers over the butte, and the legend of the sheepherder whose herd was inexplicably driven over the cliff, is interesting material.

Another subject of reading in the ARGOSY that I like, is the stories of the Legion. There is always plenty of action in these stories; and enough of cruelty and death to satisfy even me, who, being a bookkeeper by occupation, am naturally exceedingly bloodthirsty.

Continue to give me articles and bloodshed in the ARGOSY, and I'm your reader for life.

ISIDOR TESLER.

A NEIGHBORHOOD institution, this copy:

Chunchula, Ala.

I have the new ARGOSY about two days, then it travels all over the neighborhood. It has always been that way, so, as a great many never return,

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I'll have to call the stories by name, not by author.

To be more specific, both with flowers and brickbats: "The Snake Mother" was disappointing. "Mob" was one of the best of its kind. Of late the short stories have been better than for years, nearly all first class, except *Jim* and *Bill*. That guy must be "writing for grits," as we would say here—his "ham and," in other words. Until his last story, O. A. Kline has been acceptable.

I was much interested in "Strong Man," that appeared several months ago, mainly because I live almost in the locale of the tale. Tell the author that the road from Mobile to Washington County is all pavement now, finished this summer, and that Oak Grove isn't the only place that makes "shinny."

As a last remark, let me express a fervent hope that you will never again disgrace your sheets by such a thing as "Moving Day."

STEPHEN T. DAWSON.

WANTS more of Talbot Mundy:

New York, N. Y.

When is Talbot Mundy coming back with his quaint character *Ben Quorn?*

Bill Peepe is another character I miss intensely. I hope you will revive him soon.

BERNARD LEINOFF.

YOUR CHOICE COUPON

Editor, ARGOSY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

5.....

Name.....

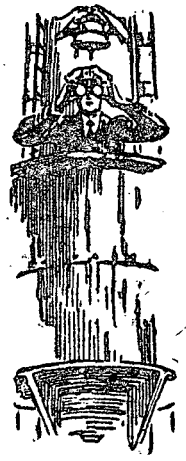
Street.....

City.....*State*.....

Fill out coupons from 10 consecutive issues and get an ARGOSY drawing (not the cover painting) for framing.

This coupon not good after December 12.

9-19



Looking Ahead!

The Gold Skull Murders

A lonely tropic isle — a young man who knew little of his father's mysterious past — a tiny, leering gold skull — a night-prowler whose mocking, fiendish laugh was to echo its death-warning across the South Seas —

The greatest mystery novel of the year, by

Frank L. Packard

The Salvage of the Sagomar

Down in the green Atlantic depths a diver battles resourceful and murderous foes. A greater story than "The Bell of the Lutine."

By Jack Allman

COMING TO YOU IN THE ARGOSY OF SEPTEMBER 26th

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I Made My First Week $146

—with the Red Lion Electric Pants Presser, writes Vreeland, Illinois. Pennsylvania man netted $76 in 4 days and Wyant of Virginia chalked up $45 in 3 days. Hundreds making big money like this. You can too, with world's newest money-maker. Good openings in every locality. Every man a prospect for this remarkable new invention that saves time, work and money.

Brand new. Nothing else like the

RED LION ELECTRIC PANTS PRESSER

Puts knife-edge crease in trousers in 60 seconds—*even while they're on.* Easy to use as a clothes brush. Positively cannot overheat. Won't shine trousers. World's fastest and easiest way to press trousers.

WRITE QUICK

for liberal introductory starting offer

NOW SENT FREE

More men needed quick to handle business in open territories. No experience needed. Sensational 2-minute demonstration gets order like magic everywhere. Complete Outfit furnished, including sample that fits in pocket. Up to 100% profit every sale. Don't miss this.

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MAGIC

Saves Many Car Washes

Here is an automobile accessory that every car owner needs. Think of it, with the Dust Puff in a few minutes' time a dusty car can be made to look spick and span. No hard rubbing, no hard work. Think of the satisfaction of always having your car looking clean and shining, and of the money that can be saved in car washings alone.

A special Dust Puff is made for household use. Cleans furniture instantly and leaves a beautiful polished appearance.

FREE SAMPLE AND BIG MONEY MAKING OFFER

Your profits as a Dust Puff agent are limited only by your own efforts. C. D. Champion of Marion, Ohio, is now selling 1,000 Dust Puffs a month. There is no reason why your territory should not be equally as good. Up to $100 a week profit is possible. Every automobile owner, every housewife is a 100% prospect. We also make it possible for you to sell to stores, garages and filling stations. Send to-day for our free sample and big money making offer.

U. S. MANUFACTURING CORPORATION
Dept 118 Decatur, Illinois

Send now for my Free Book!

It tells you, page by page, how to get a steady

Government Position

I have shown thousands of fellows like you the way to secure the well-paid, **permanent** Civil Service jobs they now hold. And the very FIRST step they took was to send for my FREE BOOK. Get it quick! It tells you exactly what I would, if you came to see me in Rochester. Page by page this book tells you EVERYTHING you want to know about getting a Government Position. Here are a few "high spots":

PAGE 4 tells *What Uncle Sam Pays*

He's the finest, squarest boss in the world. You don't have to worry all the time about layoffs and being "fired"; HARD TIMES DO NOT AFFECT THE GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEE; and he gets an average of $200 a year more than other workers. Railway Postal Clerks start at $1,850 a year—can work up to higher paid jobs. My book gives salaries of every branch.

PAGE 9 tells *How You Pick Your Job*

Pick the job you want; I'll help you get it. You can work in your home town, travel, or work in Washington, D. C. Uncle Sam has many openings.

PAGE 12 tells *How I Prepare You Quickly*

For eight years I was Official Examiner of the Civil Service Commission, so I know just what kind of questions are asked. You can depend upon me to help you to pass HIGH, and be offered one of the FIRST jobs open.

PAGE 18 tells *About Raises Every Year*

You don't have to take the boss's vague promise of a raise—and never get it. You can **depend** on your increase from Uncle Sam. Read all about this BIG ADVANTAGE in my FREE BOOK.

PAGE 18 tells *About Vacations with Pay*

In some branches you get up to 30 days with pay every year, and up to 30 days' sick leave. See my book for full information on this liberal plan.

PAGE 10 tells *About Civil Service Pensions*

Uncle Sam doesn't chuck you out when you're "too old." He retires you on a generous pension. Get my book and read all about this.

MAIL COUPON TODAY!

If you're an American citizen, 18 to 50, you can quit worrying FOREVER about losing your job or being laid off. I mean it! There's a wonderful PERMANENT position waiting for you in the Civil Service. You can be a Railway Postal Clerk, Postmaster, Customs Service Man, Post Office Clerk, City Mail Carrier, or get any of the other positions described in my book. Send for it NOW and find out how I help you GET THE JOB YOU WANT! Get ready NOW for the *next* Railway Postal Clerk Examination. Mail the coupon today!

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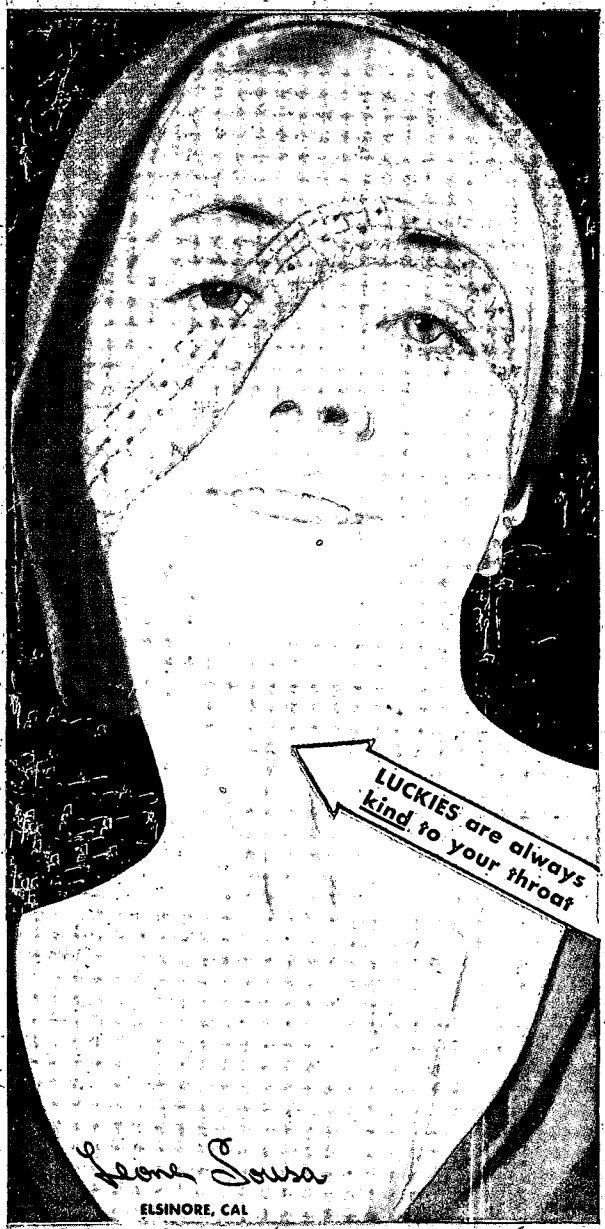
Consider your Adam's Apple!!*



Don't Rasp Your Throat With Harsh Irritants

"Reach for a **LUCKY** *instead"*

The great Lord Tennyson in a beautiful poem refers to a woman's Adam's Apple as "The warm white apple of her throat." Consider your Adam's Apple. Touch it—your Adam's Apple—That is your larynx—your voice box—it contains your vocal chords. When you consider your Adam's Apple you are considering your throat—your vocal chords. Protect the delicate tissues within your throat. Be careful in your choice of cigarettes. Don't rasp your throat with harsh irritants! Reach for a LUCKY instead. Here in America LUCKY STRIKE is the only cigarette which brings you the added benefit of the exclusive "TOASTING" Process, which includes the use of modern Ultra Violet Rays. It is this exclusive process that expels certain harsh irritants present in all raw tobaccos. These expelled irritants are sold to manufacturers of chemical compounds. They are not present in your LUCKY STRIKE. And so we say "Consider your Adam's Apple."

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"It's toasted"

Including the use of Ultra Violet Rays

Sunshine Mellows—Heat Purifies

Your Throat Protection—against irritation—against cough

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